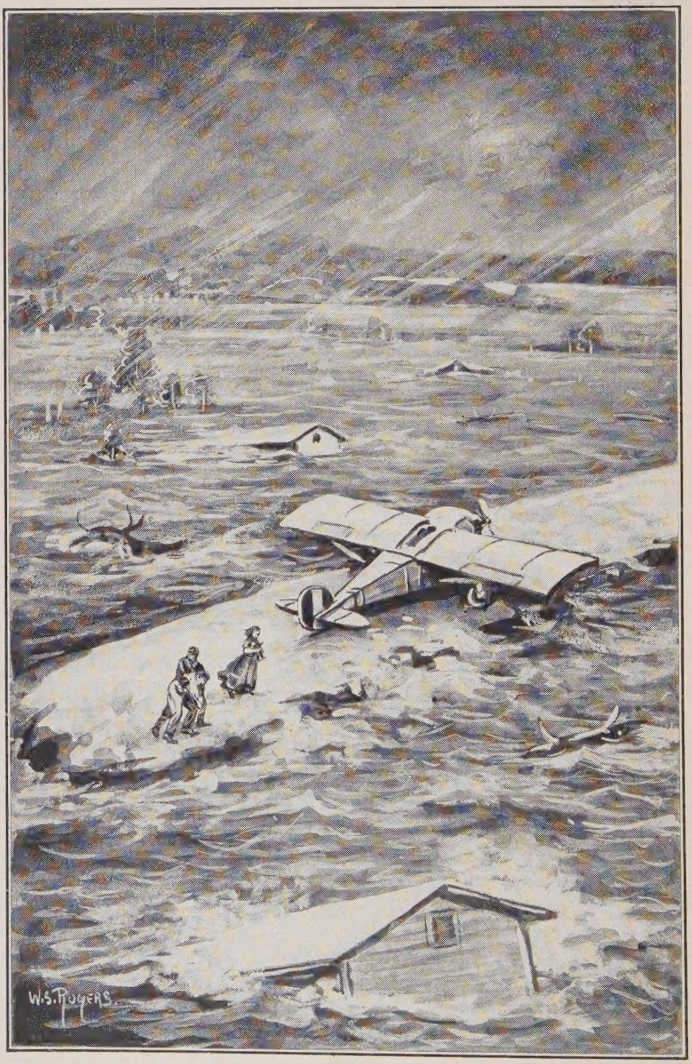
RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS

Ted Scott
Flying Stories

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

Love and "Merry Christmas"
to
Edward Benjamin
from
Aunt Bertha
1929.



"RUN TO THE PLANE!" TED SHOUTED TO THE WOMAN.
Rescued in the Clouds. *Frontispiece.*

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS

OR

TED SCOTT, HERO OF THE AIR

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS,"
"OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL,"
"THE HARDY BOYS: THE HOUSE ON THE CLIFF," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
Or Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight
RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
Or Ted Scott, Hero of the Air
OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
Or Ted Scott Lost in the Wilderness
FIRST STOP HONOLULU
Or Ted Scott over the Pacific

THE HARDY BOYS MYSTERY STORIES

THE HARDY BOYS: THE TOWER TREASURE
THE HARDY BOYS: THE HOUSE ON THE CLIFF
THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE OLD MILL

(Other volumes in preparation)

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RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS

CHAPTER I

A Terrific Explosion

"There he comes! That's his plane, 'way up there to the north!" exclaimed Breck Lewis, as he stood among a great crowd on the Bromville aviation field, most of whom, like himself, were eagerly scanning the skies.

Mark Lawson, to whom the words were addressed, looked in the direction indicated and snorted:

"You're crazy. Can't you see that's a biplane? Ted Scott's coming in the same monoplane in which he crossed the Atlantic. Catch him using any other unless he had to. Why, that plane's the same to him as a brother."

"You'll notice that Ted always says 'We' when he talks about his trip," grinned Jack Forrest. "He gives the plane half the credit for having won that twenty-five thousand dollar prize."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Breck. "Gee, fellows, it doesn't seem as though there were that much money in the world. And Ted Scott's got it."

"And do you remember when he went up with Tom Maltby less than a year ago Ted's cash capital was a dollar and twenty-seven cents?" laughed Mark.

"He's gone up like a rocket," declared Jack. "It's enough to turn a fellow's head."

"Not good old Ted's, though," affirmed Breck. "He's the same regular fellow he always was. Remember how he ran away from all the big bugs in Washington just to have a chinfest with us? You can't spoil Ted Scott."

The aviation field on which the young men were standing was fairly black with people. Business had been suspended, and practically the whole population had turned out, except those who were bed-ridden.

It was the greatest day in Bromville's hundred years of history. The town was aflame with pride and excitement. For on that day Ted Scott, the famous conqueror of the Atlantic, the youth who had thrilled the world by his daring non-stop flight from New York to Paris, was coming back to receive the welcome of his old home town.

Washington had welcomed him and the President of the United States had decorated him.

New York had gone mad over him. The whole world had showered honors upon him. And now he was coming to the people he loved and who loved him, those among whom he had grown up as a lad, those upon whom was being reflected the glory of his exploit. He had put Bromville on the map, made it the envy of all towns of similar character in the State.

And not only Bromville had turned out to do honor to its most illustrious citizen, but thousands and tens of thousands had come from points as far as a hundred miles away to take part in the great celebration.

"And every one of them will be crazy to shake hands with him," observed Mark.

"Not every one," grinned Breck. "I can mention two offhand who'd be glad to biff him."

"Whom do you mean?" cried Mark.

"Those ginks over there," replied Breck, indicating two young men standing on a plank supported by two barrels.

They were twins, and the family resemblance between them was strong. Both were of medium height, with coarse, red hair, big teeth that protruded a little, and mean, shifty-looking eyes. They were flashily dressed, and their faces bore the marks of dissipation. Both carried themselves with an arrogant air that betokened a mixture of the snob and the bully.

"Oh, Greg and Duck Gale," said Mark, with

an accent of distaste. "Yes, they always were sore on Ted. Tried to bully him, and he told them where they got off. I'll bet they're fairly gnashing those big buck teeth of theirs at the sight of this crowd turned out to welcome Ted Scott. But what those rats think of him doesn't count."

"No," agreed Jack. "It's a compliment to anyone to have Greg and Duck hate——"

He was interrupted by a yell from the crowd that deepened into a thunderous roar.

"There he comes! There he comes! Scott! Ted Scott! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Far up in the sky appeared what seemed to be a silver streak, that was coming with meteoric speed. It grew bigger and bigger until it resolved itself into a monoplane. No need to tell what that monoplane was. It had been pictured a thousand times in the press until its outlines were familiar to all, the gallant *Hapworth* that had carried its intrepid pilot over the seas into Paris and the hearts of the world.

The plane came down in long, swooping spirals until it was about five hundred feet above the field. Then, at a touch from its pilot, it dipped, swerved, side-slipped, looped the loop and did some barrel rolls that made the spectators gasp. It was Ted's way of telling them how glad he was to be home.

And then, while the bands blared and the crowd yelled itself hoarse, Ted brought the plane to a perfect landing. The throng surged along with him until he came to a stop.

Ted thrust his head out of a window at the side of the cockpit with his inimitable smile in evidence.

"Hello, folks!" he called out, but got no further.

For in the wild rush that ensued, he was fairly dragged from the plane, and found himself the center of a shouting, cheering mob, with everyone trying to get at him at once, to catch his glance, to shake his hand, to clap him on the shoulder. Bromville had simply gone crazy.

It seemed for a time as though he would be smothered or torn apart. And it was only when his old comrades of the Aero Plant, with big Bill Ellison at their head, formed a flying wedge and broke into the crowd and rescued him that he had time to catch his breath.

And then Bill and Jack and Breck and Mark hoisted Ted on their shoulders and paraded up and down the field, with the crowd cheering like mad, and finally drew up at the grandstand, where they delivered him to the committee that was to give him the formal address of welcome.

And it was a distinguished committee, for, besides the Mayor and local dignitaries, it em-

braced Congressmen, Senators, and the Governor of the State, who had come to share in the town's greeting to its guest of honor.

But Ted had no eyes for these celebrities. For on the stand he caught a glimpse of his foster-father and mother, old Eben and Charity Browning, and, forgetting all else, he made a dive for them.

There were not many dry eyes in the crowd as Ted drew the dear old couple into his strong arms and kissed Charity on her trembling lips.

"My dear, dear boy!" quavered Eben huskily, feeling for his handkerchief.

"Oh, Ted, Ted!" sobbed Charity, "The Lord has given you back to me. Bless His holy name!"

It was some time before Ted could release himself from her clinging arms and take the place allotted to him in the stand.

And then came a succession of speeches, in which full and fervent justice was done to Ted's great exploit. The Governor told of the glory that Ted had brought to the State that was proud to call him its most distinguished son. Mayor Bixby waxed eloquent as he told incidents of Ted's boyhood in the town and of the upright, modest bearing that had made him a general favorite at a time when they never dreamed of the fame that was to come to him. Major Devally, the head of the Devally-Hipson

Aero Plant in which Ted had served his apprenticeship as a maker of planes, spoke of the high regard the firm and his fellow workmen had had of his character and ability.

And with the speeches were interspersed gifts, a gold watch and diamond-studded chain from the township, and a solid gold miniature of the *Hapworth* from the Aero Corporation, complete in every detail.

And when Ted's turn came to reply, he did so in the simple, modest way that was habitual with him, thanking them heartily for their magnificent reception and giving the greater share of credit for the exploit to his plane that had carried him so staunchly over the seas. He mentioned Bill Ellison and Tom Maltby by name, and those worthies, blushing furiously, were compelled to stand while the crowd gave them a round of cheers. And when Ted's short speech came to an end the applause was deafening and the band struck up "Hail to the Chief!"

It was a great day for Bromville and a greater one for Ted Scott to whom the sincere, warmhearted greeting of his own people was dearer than the honors he had received from kings.

When the more formal ceremonies were concluded, Ted came down from the stand and started down the field to his plane, with the

crowd streaming along with him. He had promised to give a short exhibition of flying as a climax to the celebration.

Mark, Jack and Breck, with some others of his old comrades, accompanied him as a sort of bodyguard to keep the enthusiastic crowd from crushing him.

The path they were following took them past the spot where Greg and Duck Gale were still standing on the plank over two barrels. From that point of vantage they surveyed Ted and his friends with a supercilious sneer.

"I'd like to wipe that look off their faces," growled Mark vengefully.

"They're suffering enough as it is," grinned Breck. "This reception is gall and wormwood to those dubs."

"Yes," added Jack, "leave them to stew in their own juice."

They would have passed on, but just then Greg was ill-advised enough to give voice to the bitterness within him.

"Of all the fake heroes!" he sneered, in a tone loud enough to be heard by Ted's friends.

"Yes," snarled Duck, "swelled up like a toy balloon. Stick a pin in him and he'd burst."

They got no further. There was a rush by Ted's comrades, the barrels were knocked over, and Greg and Duck went sprawling in the dirt.

Furiously they scrambled to their feet, and

were met with a volley of flying fists that sent them scurrying like frightened hares to safety. They would have been pursued, but Ted called his friends off.

"They've got enough, fellows," he said. "Nix on the rough house. They'll remember you for a while. Come along."

They reached the plane, about which Ted had been worrying somewhat, as he remembered his experiences with souvenir hunters in Paris. But Big Bill had established a guard about it and everything was in perfect condition.

"So long, fellows," cried Ted cheerily. "I'm off."

He drew on his helmet and was about to jump into the cockpit when from beyond the railroad tracks there came the roar of a terrific explosion.

It sounded like the crash of worlds!

CHAPTER II

A Race for Life

So terrible was the unchained force of the explosion that the ground reeled and some of the spectators were thrown prostrate.

Had the crowd been indoors, there would have been at hand all the elements of a frightful panic. As it was, the air was rent with shouts of men and screams of women, and had it not been for the cooler heads, some might have been trampled to death in the surging over the field of multitudes rushing in a direction opposite to that from which the roar had come.

From the other side of the railroad tracks a great volume of smoke was rising toward the sky.

"The dynamite's exploded!" cried Big Bill. "That great store of it that the railroad was using in blasting out the new cut."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Mark. "I hope no one was near there when the thing went off."

"Not likely," replied Ellison. "Even the

railroad workmen have had this day off to join in the celebration."

Now that the first panic had somewhat subsided, there was a concerted rush of Ted, Bill and a host of others toward the railroad tracks that lay just the other side of the aviation field.

That is, the tracks had lain there. But as they reached the spot they saw that the tracks were there no longer. Instead, the roadbed had been utterly destroyed, and the tracks were twisted, grotesque masses of worthless metal.

And worst of all, the big bridge that crossed the Rappock River at this point had been blown into flinders.

Suddenly a thought came to Big Bill that made his usually ruddy face turn the color of ashes.

"The express!" he cried. "The Cannonball express! It's due at the Greenville station in ten minutes! And Greenville's eight miles away. If it once leaves there without knowing of this, it'll go into the river!"

"We must telephone, telegraph!" exclaimed Breck. "We'll be able to warn them that way."

With a groan, Bill pointed to the poles and wires that had been shattered in the explosion.

"Not a chance," he murmured. "Those wires are done for."

"An automobile," suggested Jack agitatedly.

"Couldn't make it," declared Bill. "It would have to make a mile a minute. Nothing on earth could do it."

"No," cried Ted. "But something in the skies can!"

Running like a deer, he reached his airplane. Bill and others who had grasped his meaning cleared the runway.

Mark had run along with Ted and started the motor going. Ted jumped into the cockpit and started the plane with a rush.

Down the runway it whizzed for about two hundred yards, and then zoomed into the skies, with its nose turned toward Greenville.

Ted's nerves thrilled with apprehension. Could he make it? There was now about six minutes left in which to travel eight miles.

If the train were on time—and that particular flyer was the pride of the road and was usually on the second—it would be nip and tuck between the plane and the train.

Could he make it? Ted breathed a silent prayer, set the throttle at the limit and shot like a meteor toward his destination.

His heart was in his throat as he thought of the lives that were depending on him, lives of men and women and little children. He *must* win.

And while the gallant plane with its intrepid

pilot is cleaving the air like a silver streak, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the first volume of this series, to tell who Ted was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted Scott knew little of his parents. As far back as his memory went he could not recall them. Up to the time he was ten years old he had been taken care of by James and Miranda Wilson. They had clothed and fed him, treated him well and sent him to school. Then they had died within a few weeks of each other and Ted passed into the keeping of Eben and Charity Browning.

They had loved the little waif from the start, and he had come to feel toward them all the affection that he felt he could have given to his own father and mother.

Eben and Charity were now advanced in years, and their financial condition had of late become desperate. Eben was the proprietor of the Bromville House, a long, rambling, two-story hotel that had once been the most prosperous one in that section. Eben's kindly, genial nature had made him a general favorite, and he had a large clientage. Bromville, a thriving town of about twenty thousand people, was situated on the Rappock River, famous for its fish, and the anglers who came there nat-

urally put up at Eben's. Traveling men, too, made the old hotel their headquarters, for Charity's cooking was famous.

But great changes had come with the passage of time. The Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation had established a mammoth plant at Bromville, and the old town began to boom. What had been good enough in the old free and easy days was good enough no longer. Several new hotels sprang up, and their handsome buildings and facilities offered a strong contrast to the shabby old Bromville House, now sadly in need of paint, repairs and new furniture. And the crowning blow had come when the Hotel Excelsior, an immense building, offering the last word in luxury, had been built, with a superb golf course annexed.

Eben could have borne this, disastrous as it was, if he had not had a bitter grievance against Brewster Gale, the wealthy proprietor of the Excelsior, a hard, mean, cruel man, whose financial career had been studded with shady episodes that should have put him in jail but hadn't. Eben had once owned all the ground on which the Excelsior and the golf links were located and had sold it to Gale for a price which, though cheap, was yet reasonable. A few hundred dollars had been paid down to bind the bargain, but Eben never got another cent. Unscrupulous lawyers, at Gale's

command, by a bewildering series of holding companies, forced sales, reorganization and other tricks had frozen Eben out and given Gale what seemed to be a clear title. And Eben, with no means to protect his rights or wage a battle in the courts, was now practically penniless, while the swindler rolled in luxury.

Ted, as he grew older, realized that Eben had been done out of property now worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, and he shared Eben's bitterness against the scoundrel who had defrauded him. But he, a mere boy, was helpless. He did all he could, however, to help out his foster parents, working about the old Bromville House and grounds and trying to make them more presentable. Then, when the Aero Plant was established Ted had got a job in the works. He was a clever and industrious mechanic, and rapidly passed from one position to a higher one until he found himself in the assembling section of the plant. He loved planes and all they stood for, and the consuming ambition of his life was to become a flier himself.

On one occasion, a Mr. Walter Hapworth, a millionaire and a golf champion, had visited the Aero works, and Ted had been assigned by big Bill Ellison, the foreman, to show the visitor around. The latter was struck by Ted's intel-

ligence and his mastery of the subject of planes. In fact, he "cottoned" to him so strongly that, when he learned of Ted's ambition to be an aviator, he offered to defray his expenses at the flying school. A Mr. Paul Monet, whose life Ted had saved by pulling him out of the way of a rushing plane, joined Hapworth in this, and Ted, at their earnest insistence, accepted the money as a loan.

At the flying school, Ted's natural aptitude and ceaseless efforts to perfect himself speedily marked him out as a "comer" among the navigators of the skies. Several times the natural hazards of his profession would have doomed him to death, had it not been for his quick thinking and superb daring.

After his return to Bromville, an exhibition, in which he took the place of a daredevil flyer who had been scheduled to perform but had been taken ill, enabled Ted to repay his debt to Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet. Incidentally Ted had learned that they were suspicious of Brewster Gale's conduct in the finances of the golf course, in which they had both invested heavily. He told them of Eben's experience with Gale, and, with their suspicions redoubled, they had set on foot an investigation which they hoped would not only bring Gale to book on their own account but possibly restore Eben's property to him. At the time this story opens they were

almost ready to "put the screws" on the oily trickster.

Ted got a position in the Air Mail Service and had a number of thrilling adventures, including parachute jumps from dead or dying planes that earned him membership in the famous Caterpillar Club, composed of members who had made similar jumps and survived.

America was agog with interest at the time in the proposed non-stop flight from New York to Paris for a prize of twenty-five thousand dollars. Ted had thought wistfully of this, but, owing to his lack of means, it seemed impossible that he should compete. In a conversation with Mr. Hapworth, the latter, to Ted's surprise and delight, offered to stake him to the plane and the necessary expenses. Ted accepted, though he knew the chances of his getting through alive were against him.

When it was known that he was going to enter against veteran pilots of world-wide reputation, most people were astounded as well as amused. It seemed the height of absurdity. But the amusement vanished when Ted startled America by making the distance from the Pacific Coast to New York in two jumps, establishing a new record. There must be something in the lad after all. Almost over night he became a national figure. And the enthusiasm became frenzy when, on one misty morning,

Ted lifted his plane into the skies and turned its nose toward Newfoundland and thence over the mighty wastes of the Atlantic.

What thrilling adventures he met on his daring flight—how often his life seemed to hang on a thread—how he reached Paris, a victor, to receive the homage of kings and presidents and the acclamations of the world—what a tremendous ovation greeted him in Washington and New York when he came home to receive the honors showered on him, while all America went mad with joy, can be read in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "Over the Ocean to Paris; Or Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight."

And now to return to Ted, as, in his beloved plane, he sped straight as an arrow toward Greenville, to stop the express that carried the lives of hundreds.

He looked at the clock that hung in front of him. He was reeling off the miles at the rate of a hundred an hour. Yes, he could make it, if he had luck.

That is, he could reach Greenville, but how and where to make a landing? He knew the place slightly, but he could recall no place close by the station on which he could bring down the plane.

On he went and on. And now the town came in view. But something else was in view too.

Far off down the track he could see a trail of smoke.

The Express was coming!

Now he was hovering over the town. He looked frantically for a place to land.

And he could hear the roar of the approaching train!

At a distance he could see an open field that offered a fair promise of a landing. But it was too far off. Long before he could get down there, the train would have reached and left the station.

Nearer the station was a plot of ground, studded here and there with trees, while along its edge ran a string of telephone and telegraph poles and wires.

Under ordinary conditions, Ted would never have dreamed of trying a landing there. It might easily mean destruction for his plane and death for himself.

But now the train was in sight!

Ted turned the nose of his plane downward!

CHAPTER III

By a Hairsbreadth

It was a terrible risk to take, but hundreds of lives were in the balance, and Ted Scott did not hesitate for a moment. What was his one life against so many?

Despite the danger, his head was cool and his nerves like steel.

By a dexterous turn at just the right second he avoided crashing into the maze of telephone and telegraph wires. But there remained the trees to reckon with. Two of these that he was approaching were so near together that he did not know that they would permit the passage of his plane on the ground between them. At any rate, it would be a matter of inches.

He knew that he would strike the ground at about thirty-five miles an hour, and at that rate a crash into a tree trunk would almost certainly be fatal.

But the fortune that favors the brave was with him. The plane touched the ground, darted between the two trees, one of the wings

barely grazing a trunk as it passed. Then, by dodging and twisting, Ted wound his way among the other trees standing in the meadow and finally brought the plane to a stop.

All this happened more quickly than it takes to tell it. But in the meantime, the train, with a great blowing off of steam and clanging of bell had drawn into the station.

Ted jumped from the cockpit and darted toward the train. He was at least five hundred feet away, and he knew that at a small station like that of Greenville, where few passengers got on or off, its stay would be of the briefest.

How he ran! The wind whistled in his ears. His feet seemed to have wings.

One hundred feet! Two hundred! Three hundred! And then a groan burst from his laboring lungs as he heard the signal for departure.

He waved his arms wildly and tried to shout, but his breath was coming in gasps and his voice failed to carry. If any saw him, they probably thought that it was a belated passenger trying to make the train, and viewed him with the semi-amusement customary on such occasions.

One hundred feet yet to go! And now the train had commenced to move, gathering speed with every second. The cars were sliding rapidly past the platform.

Summoning all his strength in a last burst of speed, Ted reached the platform and with one wild plunge grabbed the railing of the last car.

The jolt seemed as though it would pull his arms out of their sockets, and for a moment his body swung out behind the rear car like the tail of a kite. But his powerful muscles were equal to the occasion, and he pulled himself back to the steps, where he halted for a moment to catch his breath.

A trainman, who had seen his leap and had come hurrying through the rear car, reached down a brawny hand and pulled him to the platform, where he stood panting.

"Bad dope, Buddy," the trainman said reprovingly but goodnaturedly. "Some day you'll be doin' that once too often. Better to have waited for the next train."

"Stop the train!" gasped Ted.

"What for?" asked the trainman. "You ain't the President of the United States or nuthin' like that, are you? It would take someone like that to stop the Cannonball."

"Stop it I say!" panted Ted. "There's a wreck ahead! The bridge is down!"

The trainman leaped for the bellcord and pulled it violently.

There was a grinding of brakes, a shower of sparks from the tracks, and the train stopped

with a jerk that almost threw the passengers from their seats. Heads were thrust from windows, and exclamations of wonder and consternation filled the air.

The conductor came hurrying through, his face like a thundercloud.

"Who pulled that bellcord and what for?" demanded the autocrat, as he looked gloweringly from Ted to the trainman and back again.

In a few hurried words Ted explained the emergency. And as he spoke, the frown vanished from the conductor's face and he grasped Ted's hand fervently.

"It's God's mercy that you were able to warn us!" he exclaimed. "There's a curve just this side of the bridge, and if we had rounded it at our usual speed, nothing could have prevented us from plunging into the river. And you say it happened only about ten minutes ago? How on earth did you manage to get here?"

"Most of the way by plane," explained Ted, "and the last five hundred feet on foot. And that five hundred feet was the hardest," he added with a grin.

"Jest managed to swing himself aboard on the last car," put in the trainman. "I took him for one of them boobs that's anxious to meet the undertaker."

"Hundreds of us might have met the under-

taker, if it hadn't been for him," returned the conductor soberly.

He reached for the bellcord and gave the signal for the train to return to the station. It did so, and there was a great outpouring of passengers, some of them fretful at the delay, others indignant, but the great majority simply bewildered.

"You say you came from Bromville," remarked one of the passengers. "That's where they're having the tremendous reception to Ted Scott and that's where I was bound myself to see the celebration. And there's a lot more on this train had the same idea."

"All off now, I suppose," mourned another. "No way to get there except by car or horse and buggy, and there wouldn't be many of those available in so small a place as this. And I sure did want to see that boy. I'd like to tell my grandchildren, years from now, that I'd shaken hands with the lad that conquered the Atlantic."

"You're one of the aviators taking part in the Ted Scott celebration over there, I imagine," said a third.

"Yes," replied Ted, "just a small part."

"I declare, you favor him a little from the pictures I've seen in the papers," remarked a passenger.

"I've been told I look something like him,"

Ted answered, with difficulty repressing a smile. "He's just about the same age as I am, you know."

"Look like him!" suddenly shouted another, who had edged his way to the front. "You *are* Ted Scott. You can't fool me. I saw you in Washington and again in New York."

"Discovered!" admitted Ted with a grin, seeing that he could not escape.

Instantly there was a wild tumult of exclamations.

"Scott! Scott! Ted Scott! Hurrah! Hurrah! Three times three and a tiger!"

The crowd went crazy with delight as they surged about the young aviator, endeavoring to touch him or grasp his hand.

Ted submitted goodnaturedly to the mauling, to which he had now become more or less accustomed, but extricated himself as soon as he could and hurried back to his plane. And the crowd streamed after him, eager for a sight of the plane that had borne its master so gallantly over the seas.

If Ted had found it difficult to come down, he found it almost equally as hazardous to go up. The field, not only because of its trees but also its limited extent, was by no means suitable to a take-off.

But at least he had time now, where before every second counted, and he was able at last

to plan out an improvised runway which, while not devoid of danger, was yet feasible to a pilot of his skill and experience. Two or three who knew something of mechanics aided him and got the motor going, while he climbed into the cockpit. Then, with a wave of his hand to the crowd that cheered him uproariously, he glided down the runway and zipped up into the air.

As he turned the nose of the plane toward Bromville, his heart was swelling with exultation. That race with death had been one of the most thrilling experiences of his life. It had been fearfully close. He shuddered as he thought of what would have happened if he had missed his dive at the railing of the last car. But once more his indomitable will and skill had conquered.

And he gained a clearer idea of the peril that had been escaped when, on reaching Bromville, he hovered for a moment over the chasm that had once been spanned by the wrecked bridge. The smoke had vanished now, and he could see the twisted girders hanging helplessly on each side while below rushed the torrent of the Rappock River. If the train had once plunged into that flood, the loss of life would have been frightful.

And now he was over the aviation field, with its vast sea of upturned faces. He knew that long ere this the whole crowd had learned of

his errand to Greenville, and would be torn with anxiety as to whether he had been successful or not in stopping the train.

So, to set their minds at rest as quickly as possible, he looped the loop twice in succession. They would know by this that he had succeeded, for it would have been inconceivable that he should indulge in "fireworks" if a tragedy impended.

Then, in a long graceful spiral, he came down to a perfect landing, and the crowd closed around him like the waves of the sea.

One glance at his smiling face told the story, and the throng went wild with relief as the rumor ran along the field.

"Trust Ted Scott to do what he sets out to do," roared Big Bill, as he clapped his hand on the lad's shoulder.

"All the same, it was a tight squeak," smiled Ted, as he gave the tale to the throng that listened hungrily. "Two seconds more and I would have missed it."

"Must have been almost as big a thrill as when you crossed the Atlantic," observed Mark.

"Bigger," declared Ted in all sincerity. "I had only one life to lose in that venture. But there were at least four hundred people on that train. And what would have happened had it gone into the river——"

He shuddered.

And now the air was full of flying planes, for the Government, to add to the prestige of the occasion, had sent on a squadron from Washington. They had arrived while Ted had been absent on his momentous trip, and were now darting through the air in all sorts of dazzling convolutions.

There were sham battles in the clouds that made the spectators hold their breaths. And the climax came when the *Hapworth,* with Ted at the controls, darted upward like a silver streak and joined in the pyrotechnics.

By common consent, the visiting planes hovered about in an immense space, leaving the center free for the hero of the day. And Ted, knowing what was expected of him, put the *Hapworth* through a series of Immelmanns and barrel rolls, nose dives and tail spins, that outdid anything the Bromville people had ever seen before.

It was a magnificent exhibition of flying, and when it was concluded there was no doubt as to whether it had been luck or skill that had made Ted the idol of the world. His superb nerve, audacity, judgment and ability had banished that doubt forever.

It was a glorious day for Ted, but there was just one thing missing to make it perfect. That was the presence of Mr. Hapworth and Paul Monet. Both had promised to be there, and

Ted was particularly anxious that they should share in his triumph.

For it had been in Bromville that he had first met them both. It was they who had given him his start, making it possible for him to go to the flying school. And it was Mr. Hapworth who had staked him to the plane and expenses for his trip across the Atlantic. He felt that he owed them a debt that he could never repay.

All that day he had looked for them in vain. He knew that, if they had been there, they would have been the first to seek him out. What could have delayed them?

The thought was in his mind as he made his landing and brought his plane to a stop. He looked out of the window of the cockpit, and a thrill of delight ran through his veins as his eyes rested on the smiling faces of Mr. Hapworth and Paul Monet.

In an instant he had jumped out and darted toward them with hands outstretched.

CHAPTER IV

The Net Draws Closer

"Mr. Hapworth! Mr. Monet!" exclaimed Ted, his face radiant, as he wrung the hands of his two staunch friends. "I'm tickled pink to see you. I had begun to fear that you were not coming."

"We were on our way in my automobile," explained Mr. Hapworth, "but something went wrong with the machine about twenty miles from here and that delayed us. But I'm glad that we got here in time to see some of the features of the celebration."

"Yes, indeed," beamed Mr. Monet. "That flying of yours was wonderful."

"And we've heard of that other wonderful flight by which you saved the train," put in Mr Hapworth. "It certainly seems that when a man is desperately needed, Ted Scott is on the spot."

"Oh that's just because I happened to be the only aviator here at the moment," replied Ted. "If any of these boys"—he indicated the

members of the flying squadron—"had been here, he'd have done the same thing."

"Perhaps," assented Mr. Hapworth doubtfully, "but he probably would have hesitated for a minute or two, and then it would have been too late. There were other fellows, I remember, who were going to try for the New York to Paris prize. But while they were talking about it, Ted Scott went ahead and *did* it. It's that lightning decision of yours, Ted, that gives you the edge on other aviators."

"Well," laughed Ted, "in the aviation game it's usually a case of the quick or the dead. How long are you gentlemen going to stay in Bromville?" he added, in an endeavor to change the subject from his own exploits. "A good long time I hope, as I want to talk over with you my plans for the future. You're the wisest and most experienced friends I have, and I'm counting heavily on your advice if you'll be good enough to give it to me."

"You can command me, *mon ami,*" responded Mr. Monet heartily.

"And me too, Ted," declared Mr. Hapworth. "All that I have is at your disposal. I don't wonder that you're rather bewildered. I hear that all sorts of offers have poured in upon you, enough in fact to make you a millionaire, if you chose to avail yourself of them."

"I suppose so," replied Ted. "The trouble

is that I don't care very much about being a millionaire."

The two men looked at each other and laughed.

"Did you ever see anyone like him?" asked Mr. Monet.

"The one man in America who doesn't want to be a millionaire," chuckled Mr. Hapworth.

"Oh, of course I know the value of money," replied Ted, "and I'm not fool enough to despise it. But there are some ways that I don't care to make it, even though they're perfectly legitimate. You see, my real business is flying. My heart is bound up in it and I don't care to do anything else."

"And it's refreshing to hear you say so," declared Mr. Hapworth. "Well, there'll be plenty of time to talk over your future course, as Mr. Monet and I expect to be in Bromville for some weeks. You see, we have a little business of our own with a certain gentleman of this town," and he exchanged a smile of intelligence with Mr. Monet and tapped his breast pocket significantly.

"You mean with Brewster Gale?" asked Ted eagerly.

"You've guessed it," replied Mr. Hapworth. "I have some papers in my pocket that I fancy Mr. Gale won't enjoy reading. In fact, I think

that gentleman is in for a bad quarter of an hour, as Mr. Monet would say."

"Good!" exclaimed Ted, his heart swelling with wrath as he thought of the misery that rascal had brought upon old Eben and Charity. "I'd like to see his face when you put the screws on him."

"I think I can give you that satisfaction," said Mr. Hapworth. "You'll have a right to be there as a representative of your foster parents, for, in addition to the personal matters between Gale and Mr. Monet and myself, I'm going to bring up the transaction by which Gale defrauded the old folks out of that property."

"Have you got evidence about that too?" asked Ted, his face alight.

Mr. Hapworth hesitated for a moment.

"Not such complete evidences as I hope to have later on," he stated. "There's a missing witness that I'd give a good deal to be able to locate. And there are other things that my lawyers haven't yet got into shape. But I have enough perhaps to throw a scare into the old rascal, and he may capitulate rather than take the risk of exposure and possibly of being jailed. Could you come to the Excelsior and take dinner with us, say, the night after to-morrow?"

"I'll be glad to," replied Ted promptly.

"Good!" was the reply. "I'll make an appointment with Gale to come to my room after dinner. Then we'll have the showdown that I've been aching for."

The two gentlemen shook hands with Ted and surrendered him to the host of others who had been impatiently waiting to have their turn with the hero of the day.

The festivities wound up that night with a great banquet at the Town Hall, which, in all its history, had never been so decorated or held an audience so distinguished. Ted was at the Governor's table, flanked on each side by celebrities of the State and Nation. Once more he was called on to speak, and, as on the previous occasion, won all hearts by the simplicity and modesty of his demeanor. And of course not one of the other speakers failed to refer to the new hold Ted had gained on the affections of his people by the daring feat that afternoon by which he had saved the imperiled train. Of course the dynamite explosion had caused great excitement, but nobody was hurt, for which everybody was thankful.

It had been a strenuous and exhausting day for Ted, and he was glad when at last he was permitted, after a last outburst of cheering, to go home to the old Bromville House.

Since he had seen it last, he had been in palaces and in parliaments, had been honored and

dined by kings. But none of the magnificent places had sent such a thrill through him as did the shabby little hotel where he had spent much of his life and where dwelt the dear old couple who had been father and mother to him and who cherished him as their most precious possession.

Not so shabby, after all, was the old hostelry now. For one of Ted's first acts when money had commenced to pour in on him had been to wire a large sum to Eben, with an injunction to spend it freely in the rejuvenation of the historic place. Already the painters had been busy, and the hotel shone bravely in the moonlight. And a large part of the broken down and out of date furniture had been replaced by new, with more improvements in prospect. If Eben had been only "one jump ahead of the sheriff" when Ted went away, he was now some miles ahead of that fearsome individual.

And tonight the place had been thronged with guests beyond its capacity to hold them. Extra help had been hired and the hotel had taken on a new lease of life. Ted had, of course, been the special attraction, as it was known that he would put up there, and people were anxious to come into closer proximity to him than they had been able to in the crowds on the field.

So once more he had to run the gauntlet of handshaking and congratulations, and it was

only at a late hour that he was able to talk in private with Eben and Charity, themselves weary but happy and proud beyond all words.

The old couple had, of course, devoured all the main facts that the newspapers had printed about Ted's epoch-making exploit. But there was a host of details about which they were eager, and Ted gave them what they wanted.

"And the President himself pinned that decoration on you?" breathed Charity, touching with awe the Distinguished Flying Cross on Ted's lapel.

"And we heard what you said in reply to him over the radio," put in Eben. "That is, I did, but Charity was cryin' so hard I don't know whether she heard much."

"You get out, Eben Browning," retorted Charity. "You was cryin' yourself like a baby."

"I had a mite of a cold in my head," returned Eben, a bit shamefacedly. "It always goes to my eyes."

Ted laughed, but his own eyes were moist. How dearly these old folks loved him!

"Well now," he said, "there's been enough talk about me. Tell me something about yourselves."

"The hardest time for us was while you were plannin' that ocean trip an' then actually makin' it," replied Eben. "We was both so

worried then that we couldn't sleep. But since then we've been the happiest and proudest folks in America."

"An' you see how fine the hotel has been fixed up, thanks to you, Ted," said Charity. "Oh, but you've lifted us out of a terrible hole, dear boy. I'm a-feelin' twenty years younger, an' Eben's so frisky, burstin' out whistlin' an' singin', thet et seems almost scan'alous in a man of his years."

"An' we're a gittin' back lots of the old trade," observed Eben happily. "Folks are seein' how nice an' comfortable we kin take care of 'em, an' then too they like to get a-talkin' about you an' tellin' other folks that they've put up at the same place Ted Scott lives in. Of course, we ain't puttin' so much of a crimp in the stylish crowd thet goes to the Excelsior, but we're holdin' our heads up, an' thet's somethin' we haven't been doin' much for the last few years."

"That's bully," said Ted. "And, talking of the Excelsior, there's trouble brewing for that old rascal that owns it." And he went on to tell the aged couple of the conversation he had had with Mr. Hapworth and Mr Monet that afternoon.

They listened with the keenest interest.

"It's about time thet hound was gettin' what is comin' to him!" exclaimed Eben. "That fel-

ler's been flourishin' like the green bay rum—I mean the green bay tree,—the Scripters tell about."

"Well, he's in for a little surprise party or I miss my guess," returned Ted. "I'm going to be there when my friends face him, and I think it will be a sight worth seeing. It seems as though I could scarcely wait for the showdown."

"I'd like to be there myself," said Eben wistfully.

It was very late when at last they separated, and Ted was so worn out with the exciting events of the day that he sank into dreamless sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

And now, for the first time since he had achieved world-wide fame, Ted had time to catch his breath and gain some of the rest and relaxation he coveted. Not that the townspeople let him alone. His appearance on the streets was the signal for a crowd to gather. But they were home folks, there was no formality about their greetings, no set speeches to listen and reply to, and he could feel himself rapidly getting back his strength and vitality. The world had tried to kill him with kindness.

In the interim, a message had come to him from the president of the road whose train he had saved, expressing keen appreciation of the daring exploit, and saying that the road was

planning a gold medal to be presented to him in recognition.

On the night appointed by Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet, Ted set out for the Hotel Excelsior. As he neared the entrance to the grounds, he met Greg and Duck Gale. He nodded to them carelessly and they favored him with a glare of hate in return.

"See the hero strut," said Greg to his brother, in a voice designedly loud enough to reach Ted's ears.

"So full of hot air it's a wonder he don't float," replied Duck in the same tone.

Ted whirled about and faced them.

"Were you referring to me?" he asked, in a voice that, despite his indignation, was as cold as steel.

Greg stared at him arrogantly.

"Can't my brother and I talk to each other without your butting in?" he asked.

"Not when you're insulting me," declared Ted, taking a step nearer.

Greg recoiled before his clenched fists and blazing eyes.

CHAPTER V

The Showdown

"It's easy enough for you to bluff," snarled Duck. "You know that if we did anything to you, the whole town would be down on us."

"Yes," put in Greg, "you're the candy kid just now, and you feel you're safe."

"Cut out the town," commanded Ted curtly. "You yellow dogs are just using that as an excuse. You've started something that you're afraid to finish. You've always been sore at me and done what you could to down me."

"Haven't we got a right to be sore?" growled Greg. "Didn't you set your gang of roughnecks on us day before yesterday at the aviation grounds?"

"You're the roughnecks," declared Ted. "No, I didn't set my friends on you. I called them off before they could give you the beating you deserved. Now let me tell you something. If I hear another peep out of you, I'll give you a trimming you'll remember for the rest of your

lives. I'll take you one at a time or both together. Get me?"

There was no mistaking his determination, and Greg and Duck felt that it would be prudent to drop the conversation right then and there. They slunk away with growls and mutterings, and Ted pursued his way to the hotel, chuckling inwardly at the discomfiture of the bullies.

He was met with the most cordial greeting by Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet.

"You're looking a bit heated, Ted," remarked Mr. Hapworth, as he glanced at him keenly. "Anything happened?"

"Oh, nothing much," laughed Ted. "I've just been having a little argument with Greg and Duck Gale."

"Those worthy sons of a worthy father," smiled Mr. Hapworth. "I guess it runs in the blood. They're a pest about the hotel. Nobody has any use for them. But come in now to dinner."

They had a sumptuous meal, during which, by tacit consent, no allusion was made to the thing that they all had in mind. Then they adjourned to Mr. Hapworth's suite and disposed themselves at ease.

"Our appointment with Gale is at eight o'clock," remarked Mr. Hapworth, looking at his watch, "and it's nearly that now.

He'll probably be along at any minute."

Promptly at eight there was a tap on the door, and Mr. Hapworth opened it to admit Brewster Gale.

The latter, as usual, was dressed in the height of fashion and immaculately groomed, as became the proprietor of the famous Hotel Excelsior. His diamonds were much in evidence.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said suavely. "I'm right on time you see."

"Yes," replied Mr. Hapworth, "I see you are. Take a chair," and he motioned to one facing his own.

Brewster Gale seated himself heavily. The cool formality of Mr. Hapworth's tone must have warned him that something grave was in the wind, but he abated nothing of his unctuous manner.

"I thought that perhaps there might be something in the service of the hotel you wanted to speak to me about," he said. "I hope that everything has been perfectly satisfactory. If not, you have only to say the word and you may be sure it will be corrected."

"I have no complaint to make about the hotel," replied Mr. Hapworth, "nor, I think, has Mr. Monet. What we wanted to talk to you about is the golf links. You know that both

Mr. Monet and I have invested considerable amounts of money in the course."

"Yes, I know," replied Gale a little uneasily. "Mr. Monet, I believe, holds shares to the amount of twelve thousand dollars, while yours, if I remember rightly, figure up to fifteen thousand. And I think you gentleman are to be congratulated on your foresight. It ought to prove a paying investment. Of course the initial expenses have been many, and it may be some time before it begins to yield much in the way of dividends. But they will come, they will come."

"I am not sure that I share your confidence," replied Mr. Hapworth, tipping the ash from his cigar. "The links of course are superb, and the tournaments already booked ought to show a handsome profit. Everything depends on the honesty of the management. And that, up to now, has been left largely in your hands."

"It couldn't have been in better hands," declared Gale with a sudden change from suavity to bluster. "I hope you're not insinuating, Mr. Hapworth, anything against my honesty."

"I'm not insinuating that you are dishonest," replied Mr. Hapworth, looking him steadily in the eye. "I'm stating that you are. Gale, you're as crooked as a corkscrew."

Gale leaped to his feet.

"That's fighting talk!" he cried belligerently.

"Sit down, Gale," admonished Mr. Hapworth. "You're not going to fight. You're going to crawl. Sit down, I say."

There was no disputing the icy menace in his tone, and Gale resumed his seat. He was trembling.

"I was never so insulted in my life," he muttered, drawing a handkerchief and mopping the perspiration that had started from his forehead. "In my own hotel too. It's an outrage, that's what it is, an infernal outrage."

"I'm not accustomed to making statements that I cannot prove," returned Mr. Hapworth, taking some papers from his pocket and laying them on the table.

At the sight of the documents, Gale's face became of a ghastly pallor.

He glanced at Ted and saw the contemptuous look on the lad's face.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "If we're going to have a business discussion, what has this young man got to do with it? I'd much prefer to talk with you two alone."

"Your preference isn't a matter at issue here," replied Mr. Hapworth coldly. "Mr. Scott is here at my invitation, because he, or the Brownings whom he represents, have some-

thing to settle with you also. Mr. Scott will stay."

"I'm not going to say another word until I consult my lawyers and have them here with me," declared Gale, making a motion to rise to his feet.

"Yes, you are," returned Mr. Hapworth, "for if you don't, I'll have you in jail before midnight."

The threat was effective and Gale slumped back into his seat.

"I know the reliance you place on lawyers," went on Mr. Hapworth, "or rather the kind of lawyers that are a disgrace to their profession. They've helped you to put across a number of your shady deals, including that with the Brownings. But they're not going to help you now. This is going to be a man to man talk."

"It's only been talk so far," muttered Gale. "You haven't a thing you can prove against me. You'll find my books all right to a penny."

"Books, like epitaphs, are often deceiving," retorted Mr. Hapworth. "Sometimes there are two sets: one to record real transactions; others fictitious ones."

"Do you mean to say I've kept two sets?" blustered Gale.

"Not physically, perhaps, but mentally," was the reply.

"You'll find that every payment on my books

can be substantiated by cancelled checks," stated Gale, with a touch of triumph in his voice.

"No doubt," conceded his inquisitor. "No crook could be expected to overlook such an obvious alibi. But that proves nothing."

"Doesn't it?" sneered Gale. "A court would be inclined to think so."

Mr. Hapworth turned to Mr. Monet.

"You tell him, Paul," he directed.

"Mr. Gale will remember," began Mr. Monet in his precise voice, "that some time ago I had a talk with him about a thirty-thousand-dollar payment made to a certain Mr. Osborn, a landscape architect, for work on the golf grounds. Is it not so, Mr. Gale?"

"Yes," replied Gale, "and I showed you the cancelled check to Osborn for that amount. It was straight as a string."

"I have sometimes thought that phrase 'straight as a string' was not a fortunate one," went on Mr. Monet dryly, "for strings have a way of curling and twisting until they are very crooked. But let that go. You will remember, Mr. Gale, that I told you at the time that I thought the charge was an outrageous one. Is it not so?"

"Yes," replied Gale, "but that was because you were not familiar with prices of labor and materials. They're fearfully high these days.

Osborn's bid was the lowest one, and that's the reason I gave him the contract."

"You are sure his bid was the lowest?" asked Mr. Monet turning his keen glance upon him.

"Absolutely," declared Gale.

"That is queer," remarked Mr. Monet musingly, "for I made a number of inquiries afterward of those who had submitted bids. One was for seventeen thousand, one for eighteen, and two offered to do it for twenty thousand. And yet you say, Mr. Gale, that Osborn's bid of thirty thousand was the lowest."

Gale for a moment seemed to have lost his tongue. Then he rallied.

"Wh-when I said the lowest," he stammered, "I meant for a responsible bidder. The others couldn't have done it lower except at a loss, and we'd have been left in the lurch."

"So?" asked Mr. Monet. "Yet these other gentlemen seemed to stand fully as high in their profession as Mr. Osborn."

"You're mistaken," declared Gale desperately. "I was sure that Osborn would give us a job for the money that was fully worth what he charged, and I was doubtful about the others. It was up to me to use my best judgment. If I've made a mistake, that's something that might happen to anybody. There was nothing crooked about it. He got his money as per contract, as the cancelled check will show."

"'A mistake of judgment','' went on Mr. Monet in silky tones. "Ah yes, that can happen to anybody. But you are reputed to be a very close and shrewd bargainer, Mr. Gale, and it seemed to me that it was most unlikely that you would pay ten thousand dollars more than a job was worth without very strong reasons.''

"My reasons were that I wanted to be sure of a first-class job,'' muttered Gale.

"That surely does you credit,'' replied Mr. Monet suavely, "but, as I say, I was curious. So I went a little further, indeed a good deal further.''

Gale twisted uneasily in his chair.

"In fact,'' went on Mr. Monet, "I went to see Mr. Osborn himself. But to my disappointment, I learned that he had started for a trip around the world that would take him perhaps a year.''

"A year!'' ejaculated Gale, with a sigh of relief that he could not repress. He was safe!

But his relief was of slight duration.

"I gathered what his route would be,'' continued Mr. Monet, "and learned that he would be in France for about a month. So I decided to go to France, where I had also other interests to call me.''

Gale was staring at him now with terror in his eyes.

"I found Mr. Osborn without much dif-

ficulty," went on Mr. Monet. "At first he was very reluctant to talk. But I had gained a knowledge of other transactions of Monsieur Osborn that would have been extremely embarrassing for him to have brought out in court, that would in fact perhaps have made it inadvisable for him ever to return to his native country. So, by a little judicious pressure, aided by some powerful connections I have in France, I finally secured from him a statement —shall we call it a confession?—of the whole transaction between him and you, Mr. Gale. Shall I tell you what it was?"

Gale licked his dry lips but could find no voice.

"It was this," went on Mr. Monet. "He stated that he had indeed put in a bid for thirty thousand dollars for the work, but with the understanding that he would privately return ten thousand to you after you had given him the check for thirty thousand. He got the check for thirty thousand. He cashed it and then gave you ten thousand dollars back—in bills so that the money could not be traced. What have you to say to this, Mr. Gale?"

"It's—it's false!" cried Gale hoarsely.

CHAPTER VI

The Cornered Rat

"False, eh?" asked Mr. Hapworth bitingly, in answer to Gale's outburst.

"Yes, false," reiterated Gale. "The whole thing is a tissue of lies. I never had an understanding of that kind with Osborn. I never received a dollar back from him."

"What reason would Osborn have for saying a thing that was so much to his discredit, as it is to yours, if it were not true?" asked Mr. Hapworth.

"How do I know what his reason was?" snarled Gale. "Perhaps he was bribed to say it. Perhaps you're all out to do me. For that matter, how do I know but what Monet here has made the whole thing up out of whole cloth? We have only his word for it. He hasn't a shred of evidence. How do I know he's ever seen Osborn? Or if he has, that Osborn has ever stated a single thing of what he has told us."

Mr. Monet paled at the insult and started

toward Gale, but Mr. Hapworth intervened.

"Go easy, Paul," he soothed him. "The man is desperate as a cornered rat, and we can disregard what he's saying. But if he wants proof of what has been said, let him read this affidavit," and he tossed a legal looking paper over to Gale.

The latter snatched it and ran his eyes eagerly over its contents.

It was in affidavit form and fully confirmed all that Mr. Monet had stated.

"You realize, I suppose," remarked Mr. Hapworth after a pause, "just what that affidavit would mean to you, if it were read before a judge and jury?"

"Yes," snarled Gale, "but it will never be read there."

In an access of fury he tore the paper into shreds and threw the fragments out of the open windows, where the wind scattered them beyond all hope of recovery.

The movement had been so sudden that, although both Ted and Mr. Monet had leaped toward Gale, they had not been quick enough to forestall his action.

"There!" gasped Gale in a tone of malignant triumph. "Now where's your evidence? You can't even get the pieces to paste them together. And Osborn is to be gone for a year. A good deal may happen before a year is over."

"It is practically a confession of guilt," declared Ted.

"What have you got to say about it?" demanded Gale. "You've got no business here anyway."

During this interchange, Mr. Hapworth had not moved a muscle. On his face was a smile of amusement.

"Rather got the best of us that time, didn't you Gale?" he queried.

"I'll tell the world I did," grunted Gale. "You've got to get up early in the morning to beat me."

"You'll admit, though, that if we had that affidavit, you'd be in something of a hole?" went on Mr. Hapworth.

"Sure thing," chuckled Gale. "That's why I tore it up."

Mr. Hapworth's smile broadened.

"You poor boob! You pitiful rascal!" he laughed. "What you tore up was only a copy. I have the original affidavit right here," and he took the paper from his pocket and held it up where all could see.

The effect on Gale was startling. His face flushed violently and then became as pale as ashes. All his boastfulness vanished. He tried to speak, but no words came.

"You see," went on Mr. Hapworth, as he carefully restored the paper to his pocket, "I

knew the kind of man I was dealing with and so took precautions. I rather anticipated what has happened. Well, Gale, how about it? Why don't you speak?"

Gale groaned.

"What do you want me to do?" he muttered.

It was a signal of surrender.

"There are several things we want you to do," replied Mr. Hapworth. "In addition to this matter of Osborn's, we have detected other irregularities—you see I'm putting it very mildly—irregularities amounting to about four thousand dollars. Add that to Osborn's ten thousand and the total is about fourteen thousand dollars. I have proof of this quite as strong as in the case of Osborn, if you demand to know what it is."

"No matter," mumbled Gale. "Go ahead."

"Now what we want you to do is to draw your check for fourteen thousand dollars to the order of the Golf Association," continued Mr. Hapworth. "That will protect all the owners of shares. Will you do this?"

"Yes," assented Gale, now thoroughly cowed.

"So far so good," observed Mr. Hapworth. "It can be put under the head of amounts recovered from overcharges, and nobody ever questions money received. They're only too glad to see it in the treasury. Now the next

thing you are to do is to call a meeting of the stockholders and offer your resignation as an officer."

Gale protested at this, but Mr. Hapworth was inexorable.

There was no help for it, and Gale sullenly agreed.

"I'll call the meeting," he growled, "and I'll pay the check into the treasury tomorrow."

"No," said Mr. Hapworth, "you'll draw the check tonight and hand it over to me to be put to the Golf Association's credit in the bank where they do business. I don't trust you further than I can see you, Gale. Write the check now."

With trembling fingers, Gale drew his checkbook and fountain pen from his pocket and drew the check for fourteen thousand dollars.

Mr. Hapworth scrutinized the check carefully, folded it up and put it in his pocket.

"That one is all right," he remarked, "but there are going to be others. Keep your checkbook out, Gale, and your fountain pen too."

"What else do you want?" Gale demanded furiously.

"You'll see in a moment," was the reply. "Sit down," for Gale was beginning to move to the door.

In impotent wrath, the discomfited rascal obeyed.

"When Mr. Monet and I bought stock in the golf course," resumed Mr. Hapworth, "you represented that the property was yours and that you had a clear title to it."

"So I have," asserted Gale curtly.

"So you haven't," denied Mr. Hapworth. "I have reason to believe that the property rightfully belongs to Eben Browning."

Gale leaped to his feet in a towering rage.

"What do you mean by that?" Gale demanded, in a tone that was like the bellow of a bull.

"Just what I say," replied Mr. Hapworth. "Eben Browning formerly owned the property on which both the hotel and the golf links are located. He agreed to sell it to you for a certain price, and you agreed to buy at that price. But, except for the first few hundred dollars paid down to bind the bargain, he has never received a penny."

"Where did you get that fairy story?" sneered Gale. "I suppose this fellow here," turning to Ted, "has been stuffing you with falsehoods."

Ted jumped up, but a motion of Mr. Hapworth's restrained him.

"Let me do the talking, Ted," he counseled. "There are no lies and no fairy stories in this matter, Gale, except what you and your scoundrelly lawyers have told. By a lot of legal jug-

gling and sleight of hand you have gypped Browning out of his property, relying on the fact that he had no money to fight you in the courts."

"I'm standing on my legal rights," asserted Gale. "If Browning thinks he has a leg to stand on, he can bring suit. But that matter's been settled long ago. In any event, he's lost his claim by sleeping on it."

"My lawyers don't think so," declared Mr. Hapworth quietly.

Apprehension leaped into Gale's eyes.

"Your lawyers!" he ejaculated. "What have they got to do with it?"

"Plenty," returned Mr. Hapworth. "I've had them looking into it for some months past. I hate to use the word 'jail' in this pleasant little talk between friends, but they've discovered things—subornation of perjury I think they say is one of them—that ought to land somebody behind the bars. If you think this thing won't be pressed for lack of money to finance the investigation, you've got another guess coming."

CHAPTER VII

A Puzzling Problem

Brewster Gale was fairly shaking with anger and terror at this new turn things were taking. He had not dreamed of the Browning affair being brought in question. But, terrified as he was, he felt that in this matter at least he had a fighting chance. Legal chicanery had aided him so far, and it might help him in the future. At any rate, he figured that the matter could be made to drag along for years.

"You can do your worst in this," he declared defiantly. "Possession is nine points of the law, and you'll have a sweet time getting this property away from me."

"That's a matter of opinion," replied Mr. Hapworth. "If you want to do the right thing with Browning now, you can do it on the original terms. I warn you that it's your cheapest way out. But if you say fight, why fight it will be."

"I say fight then," blustered Gale, as again he started for the door.

"Just a minute, Gale," admonished Mr. Hapworth. "We're not through with you yet."

"What else do you want?" growled Gale, slumping sullenly into his seat.

"Just this," said Mr. Hapworth. "When Mr. Monet and I took shares in this golf course, we did so under your representation that you owned the ground on which they are located. If that were really so, in our opinion, we would hold on to our stocks. But in the event of the property being returned to Browning, our shares would probably only be waste paper. We demand therefore that you buy our shares at the price we paid for them. If you should finally be declared the owner of the property, you will have stocks of full value. If, however, it is proved the property was obtained by fraud, you will be the loser, as you deserve to be."

"I won't do it," declared Gale in a passion. "You can't make me buy what I don't want to buy."

"No, but we can force you to make restitution for money obtained under false pretences," replied Mr. Hapworth. "You can either buy back the stocks at what we paid for them, or you can stand suit. It makes no difference to us what you do. I'll give you two minutes to decide."

He took out his watch and sat back in his chair indifferently.

Gale did some hard thinking during that next two minutes. But of all things he wanted, there was nothing that he wanted less than publicity. There was more than one of his schemes that could not stand the light of day. As far as possible, he desired to work, like the mole, in the dark.

Mr. Hapworth snapped his watch shut.

"Time's up," he announced crisply. "What about it?"

With a grunt of rage Gale again resorted to his checkbook.

"What are the amounts?" he snarled.

There was some figuring and Gale wrote out two checks, in return for which Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet handed over their shares, with a brief memorandum of the transactions.

"Are you through at last?" Gale asked as he glared at them.

"That's all for tonight," answered Mr. Hapworth. "This concludes all personal dealings with us. That is, provided you call the stockholders' meeting and resign as an officer. I'll keep tabs on you for that. And don't forget, Gale, that, unless you square matters with the Brownings, something's going to drop. You'll do well to get from under."

Gale choked with rage as he attempted to

mutter something, and hurried out, slamming the door behind him.

The three left behind looked at each other with a smile.

"Seems to be somewhat peeved," remarked Mr. Hapworth, as he lighted a fresh cigar.

"You put it mildly when you said that he was going to have a bad quarter of an hour," chuckled Ted.

"We had him—what is it you Americans say?—dead to rights," observed Mr. Monet with great satisfaction.

"It's so seldom a rascal really gets justice that it's refreshing when it does occur," said Mr. Hapworth. "I'm only sorry, Ted, that he seems to be so stubborn in the matter of your folks. You see, I didn't have the proof there that I had in the case of the golf course deal, or I'd have pressed him harder. As it was, I couldn't do much more than bluff."

"You've got him mighty worried just the same," returned Ted. "By the way, just what is the status of Eben's case?"

"The outlook is good," replied Mr. Hapworth. "My lawyers have already discovered grave irregularities—rank perjury in one or two cases—that they think gives Eben more than a fighting chance. But they couldn't go into court just now without a chance of losing. There are a couple of papers and a witness that

they're especially anxious to get hold of. But they haven't been able to find the papers, and the witness seems to have vanished into thin air. They've made inquiries in all kinds of likely places and can't find a trace of him."

"Perhaps the papers have been abstracted from the files, or the man may have been bought up by Gale," suggested Ted.

"Possibly," conceded his host, "but it's hardly likely. At the time the deal was made, things were conducted in a rather free and easy way at the county seat. The man in question, some officer of the recorder's staff, was an absent-minded old fellow who often carried his office in his hat. He might carry about papers for days before he put them in the official archives. But there was never any doubt of his honesty. He was a Southerner by birth—Calborne or Cleburne or something like that by name, as I remember—and, shortly after this matter was put through, resigned his office and went South to spend the remainder of his days. But the South is a pretty big place, and up to date my lawyers haven't been able to locate him. Maybe at this moment the papers are in some discarded old coat of his. I'd give a lot to be able to put my hands on the old fellow."

"Same here," replied Ted. "But we may

find him yet. And while we're talking about lawyers, Mr. Hapworth, I want you to let me bear all the legal expenses that have accrued up to date and that will be incurred in the future. It's been awfully good of you to have undertaken this for us when there was no hope of our being able to make return. But, as you know, I have plenty of money now and more coming—this too due to your kindness and Mr. Monet's in giving me my start—and from now on you must let me pay all expenses."

"Oh, let that go," laughed Mr. Hapworth. "If Eben gets his property back, he can settle then."

"No, thank you just the same," persisted Ted. "Whether he wins or loses, I want to bear all the expense of the suit."

"Stubborn as ever, I see," laughed Mr. Hapworth. "Well, have it your own way, Ted. The law firm is Eldridge, Barstow and Harkins. Mr. Barstow, I think, is the member of the firm who has paid especial attention to your case. I'll give you their address," and he scribbled it down on a card.

"Thank you, very much," said Ted, as he pocketed the card. "I'll go to see them just as soon as I can. And I hope soon they'll be able to give Gale another bad quarter of an hour."

The conversation veered then to other subjects, and it was late when Ted bade his friends goodnight and started for home.

There was no moon and the night was very dark, and it was only by their voices that Ted recognized two young men, who were describing a somewhat zigzag path as they passed him on their way to the Excelsior.

"The rottenest luck!" Greg Gale was saying thickly. "They cleaned me out."

"And I had to give them I.O.U.'s for over a hundred," grumbled Duck. All they left me was my shirt."

"We'll have to strike the governor to help us out," muttered Greg.

"He'll be sore as the mischief," Greg foreboded. "You know how furious he was the last time he paid our card debts."

Ted smiled to himself as he went on. He could see the reception Greg and Duck would get, if they approached their father in his present state of mind.

Eben and Charity were waiting up for Ted, despite the lateness of the hour, for the devoted couple grudged every moment they were separated from him.

"Well, Ted," Eben greeted him eagerly, "did they put the screws on Gale?"

"You'd have thought so if you had been

there," laughed Ted, and went on to narrate the events of that momentous evening.

The old couple listened with breathless interest, and interjected many questions as Ted went along.

"So that rascal is getting his at last," chuckled Eben. "It's about time."

"I hope he'll repent and turn to the Lord and live," said Charity.

"He wasn't a bit repentant tonight," replied Ted, "only furious because he had been detected."

"I'm glad that Mr. Hapworth and Mr Monet have made him pony up," said Eben. "I only wish that we had more proof of the way that hound cheated me out of my property."

"Yes," replied Ted, "that would have made it the end of a perfect day. But don't you worry. We're on his trail now. If we can only get hold of that missing witness, we'll probably be on velvet."

"More'n likely he's dead and buried by this time," sighed Charity, "seein' as he was an old man at the time."

"Seems to me I remember seein' a feller named Claiborne, or sumthin' like that, over at the county seat," mused Eben. "But I never knew him well enough more'n to pass the time of day with him. Had a mustache an' goatee

an' very polite an' soft spoken, but always moonin' about like as though his head was in the clouds. I'd know him if I ever seen him again."

"Well, we haven't located him yet, but we may any time," Ted encouraged them. "In the meantime, we won't exactly starve."

"No, thanks to you, dear boy," said Charity, patting his hand as tears started to her eyes. "The Lord was good when He gave you to us."

"Good when He gave you to me," responded Ted fondly.

The next few days were busy ones for Ted, pleasantly busy, for he was engaged most of the time in sorting out the immense number of presents that had been sent to him by admirers. For, from the moment he had made his great flight, gifts had poured in on him from all parts of the world.

Cups, medals, vases, belts, thermos bottles, cigar holders—for which he had no use—watches, chains, scarfpins, cuff links—these and a host of others were numbered literally by hundreds. Many of them were of solid gold, others were encrusted with jewels and the aggregate money value was enormous.

So many were the gifts and so costly that it would have been inexpedient to keep them in the old Bromville House, as Ted had at first

intended to do, and he was forced to make arrangements with one of the local banks to store them in its vaults, awaiting his further directions.

Then came the classification of his letters and the various financial offers that had come in like a flood. These letters, amounting to over twenty thousand, would have swamped Ted, if he had had to read them all, to say nothing about answering them.

And here again the thoughtful kindness of Mr. Hapworth had been in evidence. At his suggestion, the whole mass of mail had been sent to his business office in New York, and a large force of clerks under intelligent supervision had sorted them out.

Many of them of course had no special value, and were promptly consigned to the waste basket. These included thousands of adoring letters from hysterical girls. Ted never saw one of them. Others were sincere and hearty felicitations on his great exploit, and a form letter was devised to answer all of them. But when all the chaff had been sifted out, there remained hundreds that demanded serious consideration. And these were forwarded to Ted for his own personal study and reflection.

And he was amazed at what they contained. In the aggregate, the offers amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars. And most of

that vast amount could be made with the greatest ease, if he cared to capitalize his fame.

If he cared to! There was the rub. He did not care to. He had an invincible repugnance to cheapening his exploit.

The Ted Scott Shaving Cream! The Ted Scott Suspenders! The Ted Scott Golf Cap! The Ted Scott Collar! The Ted Scott Walking Shoes! He shrank from these disgustedly.

Yet in five minutes, by simply writing a letter permitting his name and picture to be used in connection with these and a score of other goods, he could make in each case thousands of dollars.

There were other offers, however, that demanded serious thought, and it was in connection with these that Ted leaned heavily on the advice of his staunch friends, Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet, whose experience in business affairs was so much greater than his own.

This time the conference was held in the Bromville House, for Mr. Monet and Mr. Hapworth no longer cared to discuss anything of importance at the Hotel Excelsior. Twice recently, Mr. Hapworth, going out of the door of his room suddenly, had happened on Greg passing close by in the corridor. Of course it might have been a coincidence, but Mr. Hapworth had an impression that he was being spied upon. The servants, too, might be bribed

to eavesdrop, or, for that matter, Gale was capable of installing a secret dictaphone somewhere in the suite.

Mr. Hapworth, in fact, would have changed his quarters, had it not been for the golf, for, as has been said, he was an enthusiast in everything that pertained to the royal and ancient game. He was anxious, too, to be at hand to see that Gale kept his promise to resign from the office that he had disgraced. So he stayed on, although it is unnecessary to state that the utmost formality marked all his relations with Brewster Gale.

"Well, Ted, what is it to be?" asked Mr. Hapworth jovially, as, after one of Charity's famous chicken dinners, he and Mr. Monet made themselves at ease in Ted's room. "Are you going to be a movie hero, a vaudeville star, or a bright and shining light of the lecture platform?"

CHAPTER VIII

The Flying Circus

"There's nothing to hinder his being all three," put in Mr. Monet with a smile, "and he could probably make a fortune in each rôle."

"What's the matter with being just a plain aviator?" laughed Ted.

"No difficulty in seeing where your heart is," replied Mr. Hapworth. "No one can keep you from flying any more than they could keep a squirrel on the ground. But you'll have plenty of time for flying later on. Just now, Fortune is knocking at your door, and you don't want to turn a deaf ear to it."

"Yes, I know," said Ted soberly, "and for the sake of the old folks I want to make enough to put them forever beyond the reach of want. And for my own sake, I want to get together sufficient capital to engage in the manufacture of planes or something pertaining to my vocation. I have a number of ideas about that which I think will be in the nature of improve-

ments, and I want to put them into practice. So I'm perfectly willing to make a reasonable amount of money in a self-respecting way."

"Right," said Mr. Hapworth, and Mr. Monet nodded approval. "Of course there are some men who, if they were in your position, would simply spend the next year scooping in every dollar in sight. And, in a sense, it would be perfectly legitimate if they did. There'd be nothing dishonest about it. But on the other hand, it wouldn't be the finest thing to do. We feel instinctively that there are some things too big to be measured in terms of money."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Monet, "and in this case Ted doesn't exactly belong to himself. He is the property of the whole nation, which is proud of him. In other words, it wasn't only a Ted Scott exploit. It was an American exploit."

"That's just exactly the way I've been feeling!" exclaimed Ted; "though I couldn't have expressed it so well."

"Well," laughed Mr. Hapworth, "that seems to make it unanimous. Now let's get down to brass tacks. Here's this bunch of offers for the use of your name for various things from shaving cream to tooth powders. I take it that they all go into the discard."

"You bet they do," replied Ted promptly. "That disposes of a big bunch right at the start."

"Well now, here are the vaudeville propositions," went on Mr. Hapworth. "There are plenty of them at fabulous prices, ranging from five thousand to ten thousand dollars a week. And each appearance on the stage would only be for fifteen minutes."

"Cut them out too," said Ted. "I'm no actor. I'd feel as though I were a freak at a side show. Let them join the shaving creams in the waste basket.

"That's disposing of about two hundred thousand dollars in the twinkling of an eye," smiled Mr. Hapworth. "How a miser would squirm, Ted, at the thought of passing up all that money!"

"Let him squirm," laughed Ted. "What are the next things on the list?"

"The movie offers," replied Mr. Hapworth, "and they're the biggest things of all. Here's one firm offers you five hundred thousand dollars, a cool half million, for a single picture. That constitutes a world record in the matter of price."

"Nothing doing!" declared Ted without a shadow of hesitation. "The movies are all right in themselves. I like to go to them myself once in a while. But they'd be paying me that money, not for what I'd be really doing in the picture, but simply because my name was Ted Scott. Instead of selling my ability as an actor

I'd be only selling my reputation. And I don't care to put it on sale."

"Another Injun bites the dust," grinned Mr. Hapworth. "We're weeding them out pretty fast, Ted. That miser I spoke of wouldn't be even squirming now. He'd have fallen dead of heart failure. How about books? You have a number of offers from publishers."

"Now you're talking!" said Ted.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Hapworth, in pretended excitement. "Is it possible that I've struck a spark from your heart of flint?"

Ted laughed, and Mr. Monet joined in.

"I guess you think that as a business man I'm a pretty good aviator," Ted said. "But that idea of a book strikes me as all right. I could give real value there for whatever money I might make. There are a lot of things I want to tell the American public. I've hinted at some of them in the few speeches I've made since I came back—the establishment of air ports, the development of commercial aviation, in which Europe lays all over us, and a number of other things that are along similar lines. A book would give me the chance to tell America what she ought to know, and to advance the cause of flying. So the idea of the book hits me hard. I can tell in plain, straightforward language, without any frills, what is in my mind, and I think I can give value received. I won't feel as

if I were gypping the public out of their dollars."

"They'll eat it up," was his friend's verdict. "So we'll consider the book as settled. It will be one of the year's best sellers, and you ought to clean up a hundred thousand dollars on it. We'll go into the matter of the choice of a publisher later on."

"Suppose," put in Mr. Monet, "the United States Government should offer you a position? There have been rumors, you know, to that effect."

"I know," replied Ted. "In fact I've accepted an invitation to go on to Washington and talk air matters over with some of the officials in charge of that service. And the letter more than hints that they have an office of some kind for me in view."

"How would it strike you, if they made the offer?" asked Mr. Hapworth.

"Not very hard," admitted Ted. "All the information and ideas I have are at the service of the Government and always will be. But I don't care for an office. To stay in a department all day long would stifle me. I'd be like a fish out of water. I wasn't cut out for an indoor man. It's the upper air for me."

The idea of lecturing was also dismissed with scant ceremony. Ted felt that there, as in

vaudeville, people would come just to look at him and not especially to hear what he had to say. And he hated the idea of putting himself on exhibition.

He regarded more seriously several offers at large salaries of positions in airplane construction concerns, and it was arranged that he should correspond with some of these with a view perhaps to come to terms.

Still more favorably did Ted consider the idea of establishing a flying school, perhaps as a separate venture or in connection with an airplane plant.

By the time the conference was concluded, the air had been cleared considerably. Ted knew at least now what he would *not* do. He had cast into the discard without a qualm offers that would have made him rich. But that had become a habit with him by this time.

The only thing that had been definitely decided on was the book. And Ted planned to get at that right away. The flying school and the airplane plant were, for the time, held in abeyance. There was no hurry.

But there was one other plan that he had in mind that would benefit others rather than himself. And he broached this to his friends before they took their leave.

"Our folks in Bromville here are mighty anxious to have a new hospital," he said, "and

it's high time they had one. The present one is old and out-of-date. There are not enough beds, the equipment is scanty, the building is almost falling down, and there is a lack of nurses and doctors. You see the town has grown rapidly, and the hospital hasn't kept pace with it.

"Now, the town has been so good to me that I'd like to help it out. And I can't think of a better way to do it than to have a flying circus. I can get a lot of good flyers, friends of mine, who will be glad to give their services for nothing, and all we'll have to provide for is their expenses. And I'll take part in the exhibition and do all I can to make it a success. There'll be a tremendous crowd here from places within a hundred miles, and we can charge a moderate price for admission to the aviation field. I'm sure we can clear a great many thousand dollars for the hospital."

"Good thing, Ted!" said Mr. Hapworth heartily. "It does you credit. Go to it. And you can count in advance on a subscription from me."

"And from me also," said Mr. Monet.

The next two weeks were busy ones for Ted. He started in at once on the writing of his book. And he entered into correspondence with notable flyers, inviting them to take part in the planned exhibition. From almost all of them

he received favorable answers that boded well for the success of the flying circus.

On several occasions he had caught glimpses of Brewster Gale on the street, and that heavy-jowled individual had in his eyes the malignity of a rattlesnake.

His hopeful sons were just as bitter. They were usually together, and took pains as they passed to mutter something insulting that they hoped would reach Ted's ears. But he seldom paid any attention. He had things more worth while to occupy him.

Irritated at his silent disdain, Greg on one occasion, when his flushed face told that he had been drinking, stopped as Ted approached.

"So you're a lawyer now," he sneered.

"First time I knew it," returned Ted calmly. "It's plain to be seen though that you've been admitted to the bar."

The retort stung. Greg advanced threateningly.

CHAPTER IX

A Close Call

"You're trying to make a fool out of me," he muttered thickly.

"Nature's done that already," replied Ted. "There's no need for me to improve on her work. Now get out of my way and let me pass."

Some curious folks, sensing trouble impending, had drawn near, and Duck, who was more master of himself than Greg, pulled his brother away.

"This crowd will all be for him," he warned. "Come along."

Greg yielded to the urging, but could not forbear a Parthian shot.

"You'll lose that lawsuit," he snarled, "and you'll lose more than that before we're through with you."

Ted looked after them with amusement, mingled with disgust.

"They're a sweet pair," he murmured to himself, as he pursued his way.

A few nights later, he was returning home,

after an errand that had carried him to a poorer section of the town. And without any reason that he could assign, he became possessed of an uneasy consciousness that he was being followed.

The night was very dark, and he could not see more than twenty feet in any direction. He paused and looked around. He could see nothing. He strained his ears. He could hear nothing.

Still that uneasy sense that some one was trailing him persisted. He tried to shake it off, but it clung to him stubbornly.

"I must be going loco," he murmured to himself.

At a moment when he was passing a high board fence, he stubbed his toe and nearly measured his length on the ground.

At the same instant a stone whizzed past just where his head had been a moment before and crashed against the fence.

Startled, Ted looked about him. He could still see nothing, but he could hear faintly the sound of running footsteps.

He started swiftly in that direction, but at the next corner found himself puzzled. The sound had died away, and he did not know whether to turn to the right or the left.

On a chance he chose the latter, with his eye fixed on a zone of light cast by a street lamp

a couple of hundred feet away. If he were on the right track, the fleeing figure would have to pass through that zone.

But no shape appeared, and Ted pulled up, chagrined. It was evident that he should have turned to the right.

But it was too late now, for the miscreant, whoever he was, had had ample time to make his escape.

Ted retraced his steps leisurely to the place where the dastardly attack had been made. By the light of a match, he saw the stone that had so narrowly missed him.

"Phew!" he exclaimed. "Lucky that I stubbed my toe, or it might have been all up with me."

Who had done it?

The answer was not far to seek. In all the world he had no enemies except the Gales. They alone had any motive to do him harm.

Brewster Gale, of course, had not done it in person. His methods were those of the fox rather than of the wolf.

But either Greg or Duck might have done it. Their hate of him was deadly.

Yet, he rather wondered if either of them personally would have taken the chance of capture and swift reprisal. They were very careful of their skins.

What was more likely, Ted concluded, was

that they had hired some ruffian to do the deed. That it had not succeeded was no fault of the rascal's aim. If Ted had not stumbled, his head would certainly have caught the blow.

If they had hired one, they could hire others. Or the first one might take another chance, in the hope that he would be more lucky next time.

In all his imaginings, Ted had not visualized the idea of personal violence. Now that possibility had to be reckoned with. From now on he would have to watch his step. He realized that he had enemies who would stop at nothing to achieve their nefarious designs. He hated to think of how nearly they had done it on the present occasion.

He kept his eyes about him as he made his way to the Bromville House, but nothing happened. He said nothing of the attack to Eben and Charity. He knew that if he did it would spell the end of peace for them.

But he did confide in Mr. Hapworth when he met that gentleman the next day. That warm friend of his was shocked beyond measure.

"I knew Brewster Gale was a scoundrel," he ejaculated, "but I never dreamed that he would go to such extremes as that."

"Maybe he hasn't," suggested Ted. "Possibly Greg and Duck have done it on their own. I don't want to make too much of this thing. It may be just a flash in the pan, some outburst

of rage that won't be repeated. But if it is a regular conspiracy, I wanted you to know about it, so that, if anything happened to me, you'd have an idea where to look for the criminal."

"We'll hope that won't be necessary," replied Mr. Hapworth. "But from now on you've got to be extremely careful, Ted. Don't take any risk that you can avoid, especially at night. And if anything else suspicious happens, let me know at once. I'll go direct to Gale and, without charging him directly with anything of which I haven't proof, will let him know that I suspect him or those precious sons of his and that I'll spend my last dollar, if necessary, to hunt out the facts. And he knows by this time that I mean what I say."

Days passed, however, without any untoward happening. And Ted, after he had got most of the preparations for the flying circus off his hands, took a day off to go to Chicago and see the lawyers to whom Mr. Hapworth had commended him.

He had intended to fly there, but he knew that the newspapers would tell of his coming and that again he would have to be the center of applauding crowds. So he quietly took the train for the great city by the lakes.

He found the offices of Eldridge, Barstow and Harkins in one of the skyscrapers, and entered

the anteroom. "Who do you want to see?" inquired a listless office boy.

"Mr. Barstow," replied Ted.

"He's busy now," said the boy. "Got a card?"

"No," replied Ted, "but I have an appointment with him. Tell him Mr. Scott wants to see him."

"Mr. Scott," repeated the languid youth, moving away . Then he stopped suddenly. His languor vanished. He stared at Ted. His jaw dropped.

"Not—not Ted Scott?" he stammered.

The clicking of typewriters stopped. Men and girls started from their seats. All eyes were turned on the visitor.

"Yes, Ted Scott," repeated Ted, feeling himself growing red. "Run along now, sonny."

The murmur now had grown into a cheer, that waxed louder and louder as it spread to adjacent offices. All sense of discipline was lost for the moment, and it was only when Mr. Barstow came hurrying out and grasped Ted's hand that the crowd fell back.

"Come right in," exclaimed Mr. Barstow, as he led the way to his office.

"The penalty of fame, you see," he smiled, as he drew up a chair for Ted. "I declare I'm almost as excited myself as the youngsters out

there. But it's your own fault," he said jovially. "Why did you go and make America so tremendously proud of you?"

"I didn't foresee this," laughed Ted," and now it's too late."

It was some time before Mr. Barstow, in the multiplicity of questions concerning the flight that he pressed on his visitor, could bring himself to the question in hand.

"I am giving this matter my own personal attention," he assured Ted," and the more deeply I go into it the greater my moral certainty becomes that Gale is an unmitigated rascal. But moral certainty, you know, won't go far in a court of law. There's got to be legal proof. And that proof must be complete. If there's one weak link, the result may be disaster.

"And the weak link in this case?" queried Ted.

"Is a missing witness named Claiborne," replied Barstow. "If we could get hold of him, I think we'd be ready to go into court at once. He's probably got some papers we'd like to lay our hands on, but even if he hasn't got those, his memory of events might be clear enough to enable us to do without the documents."

"My foster-father has a dim memory of the man," observed Ted. "It seems that he's an

absent-minded sort of chap. The rumor is that he went back South."

"Yes," replied Mr. Barstow, "he was a Southerner by birth. Came into a little windfall we've learned, a legacy of some kind, threw up his job here and drifted back home. Used to have an old darky, sort of family servant, named Jefferson Pepp. We've searched the directories of scores of Southern cities and found lots of Claibornes, but none of them proved to be the man we want. But now we're writing to the postmasters of the smaller towns, and we may come across him yet. While there's life there's hope, you know."

Ted went over the papers in the case with Mr. Barstow, and was appalled at the evidences of rascality and downright perjury that had already been unearthed.

"Seems to me that we have enough here to convince any judge or jury," Ted remarked.

"It's a strong case," admitted Mr. Barstow," and if worse comes to worst, we'll take it into court just as it is. But we'd like to make it absolutely ironclad, and we're convinced that Claiborne's papers or his testimony would make it that. We'll wait a little longer before we give up all hope of finding him."

There were sundry affairs of business to be attended to in the matter of charges and ex-

penses, and then Ted escaped down a private elevator to avoid the crowds that, from past experience, he knew would be gathered in all the halls of the building.

But he was not so lucky with the reporters, for those enterprising young men, scenting some such move, had sentries posted when Ted emerged, and they hung on to him relentlessly until they had drained him dry of what information he cared to impart regarding his future movements.

This was designedly vague, but it was good for at least a couple of columns of copy and a grunt of approval from the city editors. And to elicit even that from those grim individuals was good enough for one day.

Returning to Bromville, Ted plunged deeply into the writing of his book. He had no special graces of literary composition, but he wrote with force and interest because his heart was in the work and he knew just what he wanted to say to advance the cause of aviation.

And now the day set for the flying circus was near at hand. A tremendous amount of interest had been aroused in the project, chiefly because of the magic of Ted's personality and the certainty that he himself would take part. The cause, too, was a worthy one, and appealed at once to the sympathies and civic pride of the

people of Bromville. Already checks were beginning to come in, some of them in four figures, as in the case of Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet. Ted was jubilant at the prospect.

The Aero Corporation had loaned the aviation field without charge, and had also furnished, free of cost, labor and materials for the erection of hangars for the visiting aviators, as well as dining pavilions, grandstands and all the other appurtenances of a flying meet. Big Bill Ellison was bossing the gang at work, and under his driving power the temporary structures seemed to spring up like magic.

Early on the morning of the day set for the exhibition, Ted, with Mark, Breck and Jack, made a tour of the field to see that everything was in order.

Ted's machine, the beloved *Hapworth,* was brought from its hangar and Ted patted it caressingly. Then he made a careful inspection of every part of it.

Motor, wings and instruments seemed to be in perfect condition. Then Ted noticed what seemed to be a scratch on one of the struts. He bent down to examine it and started back in horror.

The strut had been cut halfway through!

CHAPTER X

A Villainous Plot

At Ted Scott's startled exclamation, his friends looked at him in surprise.

"What's the matter?" asked Mark.

"Look as though you'd seen a ghost," declared Breck.

"Anything wrong with the machine?" asked Jack solicitously.

"Wrong!" exclaimed Ted, his dismay rapidly giving place to anger. "Look at this strut! Some scoundrel has cut it nearly through."

"You're crazy," said Mark incredulously.

"Look for yourself," commanded Ted.

They bent down and examined it closely, and could see the mark made by a fine saw. The cut had later been filled with wax and smoothed and polished to such a degree that it almost defied detection.

Ted took out his knife and dug out the wax and then it could be seen how deep the saw had gone.

They looked at each other in wrath mingled

with consternation. If Ted had gone up into the air with the plane in that condition, there was no question but what, in some of the more strenuous of the stunts, the weakened strut would have given way, and Ted might have come plunging down through the air to his death.

Ted was almost speechless with rage. Someone had tried to kill him! Only his keen eyesight had saved him.

And his anger swelled too at the outrage done his plane, the noble, gallant plane that had carried him so safely and swiftly over the sea, the plane that he had come to love as though it were a living thing. Through the plane some miscreant had struck at the master. If disaster had happened, both would have crashed together.

Big Bill Ellison came bustling up.

"What are you chaps so excited about?" he demanded.

Ted told him, and Bill's usually ruddy face grew pale. He fairly stuttered in his wrath.

"Who—who could have done it and when?" he burst out.

"It must have been done last night," answered Ted "The plane was all right when I saw it yesterday. You see, there are a lot of workmen, pilots and mechanics on the field, and no one would pay the fellow, whoever he

was, any special attention. Besides, no one had dreamed that anything like this would happen. It would have been an easy thing to get into the hangar and work at leisure in the dark. But you bet that after this there'll be a guard on the plane, night and day."

"If I could get my hands on the villain, I'd tear him apart," Big Bill gritted through his teeth. "We'll notify the police at once and try to catch him."

"Nothing like that," objected Ted. "The news would raise a hullabaloo all over the country. We'd be swamped with reporters. Then too, it would cast a damper on the day's sport. No, let's keep this thing under our hats. Whatever we do to hunt him out will be on the quiet."

"Who could have done it?" wondered Mark. "What double-dyed scoundrel has any reason for trying to kill you?"

"No one of course has any sufficient reason," answered Ted, "but it's certain that someone has the desire to do it. And the result to me would have been the same."

"Looks to me like the work of a crazy man," vouchsafed Breck.

"Crazy as a fox," returned Ted dryly. "But there's no use guessing just now. The thing to do is to repair the plane. We'll have to put in another strut."

"Leave that to me," directed Bill. "I'll set a gang at it right away, and we'll have it in shape by the time you need it this afternoon.

Ted's mind was in a whirl as he slowly left the field and made his way back to the hotel. The matter was growing deadly serious. Twice within a few days he had come within an ace of death or terrible injury.

In his own mind he had no doubt where to look for the instigator or instigators of the attempted crime. But here, as before, he had not a scintilla of proof against any of the Gales.

He shrank from hiring a detective, because of the flood of publicity it would involve. The whole nation would be aroused, and he would be deluged with sympathizers either in person or by letters.

No, for the present he must depend on himself, on his own keen observation, on his own caution. Luckily, he had been put on his guard. And he vowed that, as far as human power could prevent it, he would not be caught napping.

By this time the town was beginning to fill up with visitors. Providence had favored the cause of the hospital by furnishing a perfect day. The sun was bright, but not too warm, there was only a slight breeze stirring, and there was not a cloud in the sky. It was an ideal day for flying.

And by two o'clock in the afternoon, the time set for the beginning of the exhibition, the field was fairly black with spectators. As he looked over the sea of faces, Ted's heart swelled with gratification. The success of the project that was so close to his heart seemed to be assured.

Big Bill had been as good as his word, and a new strut, quite as powerful and reliable as the former one, had been adjusted to the *Hapworth*. The plane stood under guard just outside its hangar, its silver-like sheathing glittering in the sun. Spectators stood about it many rows deep, looking with admiration at the historic plane that had carried its master over the ocean and now proudly shared in his fame.

"She's a beauty, isn't she?" asked a voice at Ted's elbow, and, turning about, he saw Mr. Hapworth.

"Nothing finer in the world," replied Ted. "You ought to be proud of your namesake," he added with a smile.

"You bet I am," replied Mr. Hapworth emphatically. "If anything happened to it, I would feel almost as bad as though it were a living person."

"Wouldn't like to see it smashed to bits on the ground, with me perhaps under it, eh?" questioned Ted.

Mr. Hapworth shot a quick glance at Ted. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Have you

a premonition that something is going to happen?"

"Not now," replied Ted, "but I had a bad few minutes this morning," and he went on to narrate the discovery that the strut had been partly cut through.

Mr. Hapworth was livid with anger.

"The vileness of it!" he cried. "This passes all bounds! Why, it's nothing less than murder!"

"That's what it was meant to be, I guess," replied Ted. "If I'd gone up with it in that condition, it would probably have smashed while I was going through some of my stunts. And I'd have smashed with it."

"But something has got to be done," cried his friend.

"What is there to do?" queried Ted. "You and I can guess pretty nearly who's responsible for it, but guesswork wouldn't go very far in court."

They were interrupted here by a member of the committee of arrangements, who came bustling up to consult with Ted, and Mr. Hapworth melted back into the crowd.

But he did not stand for long in one place. He threaded his way through the throng, as though in search of some one. And his eyes lighted up as he caught sight of two young men with field glasses, near the center of the crowd.

Unostentatiously, Mr. Hapworth took up a position sufficiently far behind Greg and Duck Gale to be shielded by some of the spectators from their sight, and yet near enough to note their every movement.

The exhibition began with a sham fight in the skies, that abounded in thrills enough to satisfy the most exacting. This was participated in by some of the army aviators, who had taken part in struggles far more grim and deadly during the World War.

The "enemy's" planes were marked with red and those of the defenders with blue, so that the fortunes of the combat could be clearly followed by the spectators. Blank cartridges took the place of bullets.

Far up in the sky appeared a raiding party of the "Reds." They came in squadron formation, spreading out as they became more distinct, and dropping flares that were supposed to represent bombs.

Then from the ground soared up a fleet of "Blues" to repel the attack. Each singled out an enemy plane and made for it.

Then followed a thrilling series of evolutions, as each sought to obtain the "weather" position, the better to attack the foe. They darted in and out, up and down, with marvelous skill and celerity, and the crack of guns was almost continuous.

At intervals, one of the planes would be theoretically crippled and put out of action. Then it would fall from a tremendous height, and seem to be so surely doomed to smash that the hearts of the spectators were in their mouths. But, at the critical moment, the pilot would sweep about on an even keel and come to a landing on one side of the field.

The battle continued with varying fortunes, with now and then a "Red" and less often a "Blue" being ostensibly disabled, until the fortunes of war clearly favored the defenders. Then at last, the enemy, defeated in his purposes, turned and fled with the "Blues" in hot pursuit, like so many falcons after their prey, while the crowd, carried out of itself by patriotic enthusiasm, yelled itself hoarse at the triumph of the country's defenders.

Mr. Hapworth noted that, while Greg and Duck followed the maneuvers with more or less interest, they were at times listless and distrait, as though they were waiting impatiently for some more important feature of the program.

Then came a series of races about the field. Pylons had been set up at either end, and these were circled by the flyers at an amazing rate of speed. The way they cut corners, so that at times it seemed as though the wings of the

machines almost grazed the pylons, kept the spectators on their toes with excitement.

It was enough to stir the blood of the most sluggish and inert. And yet, even at the most breath-taking moments, Greg and Duck showed an apathy that, to say the least, was curious. And that singular waiting attitude still persisted.

And it was only after a number of other spectacular features had been run off that they really seemed to rouse themselves. And that was when Ted Scott went up for the exhibition that had been reserved as the stellar feature of the program.

Then, at last, Greg and Duck seemed to wake up. Mr. Hapworth noted that their eyes were sparkling with mingled excitement and malignity.

Half a dozen other planes formed Ted's escort, as the *Hapworth,* like a silver streak, soared majestically into the skies.

They went through a dazzling series of evolutions, maneuvering in tightly banked curves, diving, side-slipping, barrel-rolling and executing figure eights.

Then the other planes went into a "Lufberry Circle," and one by one dashed out of it at a tangent and landed.

Two or three had thus gotten down, when one

of the remaining planes veered out of the circle, deflected probably by a "bump" in the air or the wash of the plane ahead. It dived slightly, so as to clear the ships following, then rose to get back in the circle.

Ted, immediately behind him, thought that the errant plane was leaving the circle to land when it first veered, and was taken by surprise when it suddenly rose in his path. There seemed neither time nor space to maneuver, and it appeared inevitable that the *Hapworth's* propeller should catch the tail of the other plane and rip it into bits.

But, quick as lightning, Ted, by a miracle of airmanship, turned to the right and zipped by with scarcely an inch between him and the other plane. That inch spelled all the difference between life and death.

There had been a gasp of horror from the crowds below when a smash seemed unavoidable. And this was succeeded by a tempest of cheers when the planes had passed without collision.

But two did not join in the cheers.

"Hard luck!" growled Greg, as he passed the glasses to his brother.

"He sure has a charmed life," mumbled Duck sullenly. "But he isn't through yet."

All the other planes had now descended, and Ted was left alone in the skies.

And that afternoon, Ted outdid himself in the daring and skill of his exhibition. He put the *Hapworth* through a series of stunts that surpassed anything even the experienced aviators present had ever seen. Loop the loops, side-slips, barrel-rolls, Immelmanns followed each other in quick succession while the crowd roared delight and approval.

"What can't that boy do with a plane?" ejaculated Mark Lawson, as he clapped Jack Forrest on the back.

"He sure has everyone else beat a mile," returned Jack. "Look at that nose dive!"

"And that tail spin!" cried Breck excitedly.

The faces of Greg and Duck were a study. Hope and fear, hope that something would happen, fear that it wouldn't, chased each other over their countenances.

And the man who was watching them didn't lose a single shade of their expressions.

Then, as a climax to the exhibition, Ted threw the plane over and whizzed across the field upside down.

It was a fearfully daring stunt and involved a great strain on the plane.

"That ought to do it!" exclaimed Greg eagerly.

"It will!" cried Duck hopefully. "Just wait!"

Twice more Ted zipped along in that hair-

raising feat, then righted the plane and in long, swooping spirals came down to a perfect landing.

With a muttered imprecation, Duck threw his glasses angrily on the ground.

"You've dropped your glasses," came a voice from behind them.

They looked around and saw Mr. Hapworth.

CHAPTER XI

A Word of Warning

"I said you'd dropped your glasses," went on Mr. Hapworth. "Perhaps it would have been more correct to have said that you threw them down. Here they are," and he stooped down, picked them up and politely handed them to Greg.

Resentment glowed in the eyes of the twins, but Greg accepted the glasses with a mumbled word of thanks.

"We've had a remarkable exhibition of flying this afternoon, don't you think?" resumed Mr. Hapworth.

"Wasn't bad," admitted Greg.

"Came mighty near being one or two accidents, though," went on Mr. Hapworth urbanely. "That time, for instance, when Scott, by his lightning quickness, just missed collision with the other plane. I noticed that you were so excited about it that you cried something about 'hard luck.' Of course, you meant good luck."

"Sure," muttered Greg, as he looked at his brother uneasily.

"We've got to go, Greg," put in Duck hastily. "We're late now for that engagement."

"It's early yet," remarked Mr. Hapworth. "I noticed, too, that when Scott was flying across the field upside down you were watching him like hawks. Feared something might break, I suppose."

"That was it," agreed Greg, his uneasiness increasing.

"I don't wonder you were worried," Mr. Hapworth continued. "It was a heavy strain upon the plane. Suppose something had broken, a strut for instance."

At the word 'strut' both of the brothers jumped. The uneasiness was replaced by a look of positive fear.

"What was there in the word 'strut' to make you start like that?" asked Mr. Hapworth, with an expression of surprise.

"I didn't jump," denied Greg. "I suppose I'm a little nervous because I've got to keep that engagement. If you'll excuse me, I've got to go now."

"I wouldn't go just yet," remarked Mr. Hapworth quietly, "for I've got something else to say to you."

"Couldn't it keep until some other time?" asked Duck. "We've really got to leave."

"I don't think it will keep," replied Mr. Hapworth. "Besides, I think you'll find it rather interesting. Did you know that some scoundrel—or scoundrels—had cut one of the struts of Ted Scott's plane nearly through last night?"

There was no disguising now the look of terror in the eyes of the twins as they saw to what the conversation was tending.

"Is—is that so?" stammered Greg after a momentary pause.

"That was awful," muttered Duck.

"I knew you'd be horrified," observed Mr. Hapworth drily. "Of course the idea was that Scott wouldn't notice it, would go up in the mutilated plane and probably be dashed to death. It's hard to think that there is such a villain—or villains—on the earth. Isn't it?"

Greg licked his lips. Duck mumbled something that could not be understood.

"And probably that scoundrel—or scoundrels—were right here on the field this afternoon, waiting and hoping for something to happen," went on Mr. Hapworth relentlessly. "Of course, they wouldn't know that the damage had been detected and that the injured strut had been replaced by a perfect one. Can't you imagine them following Scott's every movement, hoping that at any moment the strut might break and the plane come whirling down?

Looking through glasses, perhaps, so as to see it better?"

By now Greg and Duck were trembling as if with ague.

"Look here," Greg managed to get out thickly, "what has this got to do with us? Anyone would think, to hear you talk, that we had something to do with it."

"Now, what on earth should give you that idea?" asked Mr. Hapworth in simulated surprise. "I just thought that, as townsmen of Ted Scott, you'd be interested in knowing about it. You might have a chance to help in tracking the rascals down."

"We—we'd be glad to do that," muttered Duck.

"Of course you would," assented Mr. Hapworth. "There's another thing that perhaps you'd be interested in knowing. An attempt was made on Scott's life the other night. A stone just missed his head that, if it had hit him, might easily have killed him."

The twins made a poor attempt to pretend surprise and horror.

"The two attempts were probably related," went on their inquisitor. "Now, what I want to say is this: Ted Scott has powerful friends, who will spare no labor or expense in tracking down anyone who may do him an injury. They already have a suspicion as to who the scoun-

drel—or scoundrels, for they think there are two of them—are that have done these things. If anything like this happens again, their suspicion may become a certainty. Do you get me?"

He looked at them as though he would bore them through, and before the blazing menace of his gaze their eyes wavered and fell.

"I won't keep you from your engagement any longer," concluded Mr. Hapworth. "It's been very good of you to listen to me as patiently as you have. And if, by any chance, you come across any one—or ones—who, you think, may have been involved in this, just whisper in their ear—or ears—that one more move on their part and they'll wish they had never been born."

He left them then, and they slunk away with such terror in their hearts as they had never known before.

There had been no direct accusation. But they knew perfectly well what Mr. Hapworth meant. Every word of that conversation had bitten into them like acid.

Ted's amazing exhibition had brought an end to the program of the afternoon, and the crowds were streaming away in an almost endless procession, talking excitedly about the thrilling performances they had witnessed. From every point of view, the exhibition had been a huge success, and the hospital fund had been swollen

to an extent far beyond most sanguine expectations.

Mr. Hapworth found Ted chatting with Mr. Monet, and to the two he narrated the conversation he had had with the twins.

"The more I watched them this afternoon, noted the expressions of their faces and caught scraps of their conversation, the more sure I was that I was on the right track," he stated, "and after I had talked to them I knew I was. If ever guilt looked out of human eyes, it looked out of theirs."

"I think perhaps your talk has put the fear of God into their hearts," observed Mr. Monet.

"I don't know about that, but it has put the fear of something," replied Mr. Hapworth. "I have a hunch that they'll leave you alone, Ted, as well as your plane, for a while at least. But all the same, keep your eyes open."

"You bet I will," replied Ted. "I think, though, that what you said will hold them for a while. I don't imagine they'll sleep very soundly tonight."

By the time the receipts had been counted the next day and all expenses deducted, it was found that enough had been realized from the exhibition to pay about one-third of the cost of construction of the hospital. It was figured that much of the remainder could be carried on mortgage.

This was gratifying, as far as it went. But there was something in Ted's makeup that never left him satisfied with a partial success. With him it was all or nothing, and the idea of a mortgage rested heavily upon him.

And a way out appeared in plain sight. For the success of the flying circus had been so great that Ted was besieged with offers from other cities to put on something of the kind there, the greater part of the receipts to go to Ted and the other flyers who would take part.

Ted figured out that a few exhibitions would bring in enough as his share to wipe out all need for a mortgage on the hospital. Not only that, but he could establish a fund for its endowment. The job would be done in princely fashion.

So he marked out his itinerary and accepted offers from half a dozen of the leading cities, intending to complete his whirlwind tour in a couple of weeks. Then he would be free for the other work he had on hand.

The trip proved a glittering success. The crowds were enormous and the receipts staggering. The passage of Ted Scott and his confreres from town to town was a triumphal procession, and before the tour was completed Ted had enough in hand to provide for the erection of the hospital free from debt, in addition to a handsome endowment.

Following the last of the exhibitions, Ted met at his hotel a former resident of Bromville, Gil Peterson, who was bursting with pride in Ted's exploits and proud to renew acquaintance.

"I knew you when you was only a little chap knee high," he said with a chuckle. "You was a likely youngster, but I never guessed you'd ever be shakin' hands with presidents an' kings.

"Airplanes was a new thing then," went on Gil reminiscently. "I remember the first one I ever saw—I was ridin' along with old Maje Claiborne,—an' I sez—

"Claiborne!" exclaimed Ted excitedly.

CHAPTER XII

On the Trail

"Yes," replied Gil, "Claiborne, thet was his name, an' I sez to him, sez I—"

"Pardon me, Gil," interrupted Ted, "but that name means a good deal to me. Who was this Claiborne and where did he live?"

"He was livin' over to Caxton, the county seat," replied Gil, "an his first name was Robert, Bob for short. I never called him nothin' else but Bob, for him an' me was good friends, 'ceptin sometimes I'd call him 'Maje,' coz, like most of them Southern folks, he was a major when he was at home anyways, an' I sez to him, 'Maje' I sez, 'how would you like to be flyin' up in the air like that?' an' he sez to me, 'Gil,' sez he, 'this ole terra firma is good enuf for me,' an'—"

"I hate to be breaking in this way, Gil," apologized Ted," but this Claiborne—what was he working at when he was at Caxton?"

"Somethin' in the county clerk's office or the recorder's, I don't exactly remember which,"

replied Gil," but some kind of official job. He wasn't never cut out jest right for it, fur he had an awful poor memory an' was always misplacin' things. Yer see, his folks had been rich oncet, an' he'd never been brought up to work. But he was sech a nice old feller, an' so perlite that everybody liked him, an' somehow or other he got by. Why, I've known him fur to carry papers around fur a week or two when they ought ter have been in the office, an' then he'd wake up an' put them where they belonged. Guess he was allers thinkin' of the South, where he had been brung up, kinda homesick, you might say, an' couldn't get his mind on his job. But he was a fine ole feller, an' him an' me was great friends."

"Where is he now?" asked Ted eagerly.

"Well, now you've got me," replied Gil. "You see, he was called down South kinda sudden like. Seems some of his folks hed died an' left him consid'able property an' a stable of race hosses. Allers great on the hosses, the maje was. So he up an' went in a hurry—hed ter be at the funeral, I suppose—an' didn't hardly hev no time ter say good-by ter nobody. I was mighty sorry, too, fur I thought a heap of the old maje. But of course I was glad to hear of his good luck in comin' inter the property."

"What part of the South did he go to?" asked Ted.

"Arkansas, I think," replied Gil, "but jest what place in Arkansas I don't know. I've been a hopin' thet some time or other I'd git a letter from him. But there, that's jest like the old maje. I've no doubt that many a time he's said ter himself, 'I must drop a line ter Gil,' an' then he's put it off an' never got really down to it. I'd give lots ter hear from the old boy."

"Promise me this, Gil," urged Ted earnestly. "If you ever do hear from him, you'll let me know at once. You'll do this, won't you?"

"Why, of course I will," promised Gil. "But why is it you're so interested in the old maje, all of a suddint?"

In reply, Ted told the man of his lawsuit with the Gales, and of the stress his lawyers placed on the finding of Claiborne as an essential witness.

Gil listened with the keenest interest.

"Well, ef that isn't jest like the old maje!" he exclaimed. "Didn't know half the time whether his head was on his shoulders or not. I'll bet he has them papers now somewhere around his old clothes. An' all this time you stewin' an' frettin' about 'em!"

"Try to think," urged Ted, "whether you ever heard him mention the name of the town he used to live in."

Gil shook his head.

"No good, I'm afeard," he answered. "I've

tried ag'in and ag'in to remember ef he ever tole me, coz I wanted ter write ter him myself an' find out how he was gettin' along. But all I kin be sure of is that et was somewhere in Akansas."

"That's a pretty big state," mused Ted.

"Yes," agreed Gil, "an' from what I read in the papers, a good deal of it is under water jest now. That old Mississippi is sure on the rampage. An' all the Arkansas rivers are tryin' ter make it wuss. Ef you should go down there now, you'd hev ter use a boat most of the time, accordin' ter my way of thinkin'."

"It sure is terrible," agreed Ted. "About the worst flood in history."

"Yes," assented Gil. "Us fellers up here don't half understand how terrible it is. We read about it in the papers an' feel a little sorry for the poor people that's sufferin', and then we turn over the pages ter squint at the baseball news. Of course we may subscribe a little money ter help along, but we think that lets us out.

"So you're in a lawsuit with the Gales," Gil went on, changing the subject. "I hope you win out. But that Brewster Gale is a pretty slick article an' as cunnin' as they make 'em. I sure do wish you could get hold of old Maje Claiborne. Even ef he hasn't got the papers, his testimony might help you out."

Gil departed soon afterward, leaving Ted with plenty to think about.

Exasperating as it was not to have the name of the town he wanted, it still was a big gain to know that he could now confine his search for Claiborne to Arkansas, instead of looking all over the South. He resolved that he would at once communicate with Mr. Barstow and put him on the trail.

He picked up the newspaper and read over the accounts of the flood. It was not difficult to find them, for they covered most of the front page and many columns on others. Up to that time Ted had been so engrossed with his book and the tour of the flying circus that he had given the flood only cursory attention.

But now, as he read carefully, his heart was wrung by the poignant details. Hundreds of thousands of poor people compelled to leave their little homes to the mercy of the raging waters! Thousands of square miles of territory submerged! A vast but as yet unknown number of lives lost! Nurses and doctors fighting against the fever and pestilence that follow in the wake of such a disaster!

As he turned the page he came upon a proclamation of the Red Cross, detailing the terrible need and calling for volunteers. Not only doctors and nurses were wanted. Engineers were needed. And what was this? Aviators!

Aviators to be the eyes of the vast army fighting the floods! Aviators to fly over the submerged region to search out the groups of men, women and little children, marooned on heights that had not yet been reached by the floods, but toward which the hungry waters were steadily creeping! Aviators to rescue the families huddled on the roofs of their houses, tumbling and tossing in the foaming torrent.

He threw the paper on a table and leaped to his feet. In a few strides he had reached the telegraph desk in the hotel. There he scribbled a message to the head of the Red Cross Society in Washington, offering his services and promising to report at the earliest moment possible.

He wound up the flying tour, paid off his helpers and remitted the balance of his funds to the Bromville Bank, to be held in trust for the needs of the hospital.

Then he jumped into the cockpit of the *Hapworth* and soared up into the skies for his journey to the old home town, where he needed a day or two to put his affairs in shape.

Luckily, his book was just about finished. He made the few final touches and sent it off to his publishers. His other plans could wait till he got back.

Eben and Charity were sore-hearted at the

thought of his leaving them, but were reconciled by the thought that he was going on an errand of mercy.

Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet also were heartily in accord with Ted's project.

"It will be not only the help you can yourself render, but the value of your name," observed Mr. Hapworth. "That will be a magnet that will attract many other aviators, who otherwise might not have volunteered. They will be glad to be in anything that Ted Scott is associated with."

"And if you are assigned to the Arkansas district, you may be able to find out something about this Monsieur Claiborne you are seeking," put in Mr. Monet. For to both his friends Ted had told of his interview with Gil Peterson.

"Yes," assented Ted, "but that will be purely incidental. I'll go to any place the Red Cross sends me, wherever they think the need is greatest. If I should come across Claiborne, that will of course be all to the good. And anyway, after the need is over I may stay down there a while and make a thorough search for him."

"Your going to Washington will help you to kill two birds with one stone," suggested Mr. Hapworth. "While the Red Cross is figuring out where to send you, you can have that inter-

view you promised with the authorities concerned with aviation."

"Good idea," agreed Ted. "I'll telegraph the Secretary that I am coming."

"Not much need," smiled Mr. Hapworth. "The papers have already got hold of that telegram you sent to the Red Cross and they're playing it up big. Anything connected with Ted Scott is first page news."

Ted made a wry face.

"Am I never to have any privacy?" he mourned.

"Your own fault," laughed Mr. Hapworth. "Why did you fly over the Atlantic?"

A couple of days later, Ted took off from Bromville and laid his course for Washington.

He was received by a great multitude at Bolling Field, but shook himself free as soon as he could and reported to the Red Cross headquarters, where his coming provided a sensation.

It was astonishing how many of the employes found that they had imperative business in the suite of offices where Ted was conversing with the Chief. And how many others who could not conjure up such an excuse nevertheless were impelled to pass the door, in the hope of catching a momentary glimpse of the nation's idol.

"Have you any preference as to where you

would like to be sent?'' asked the Chief, when at last they got down to business.

''Not the least,'' replied Ted promptly. ''Send me where the need is greatest.''

''Not much choice,'' said the Chief sadly,'' for the need everywhere is almost overwhelming. Still, Arkansas seems to be the hardest hit just now. Suppose we say Arkansas?''

''Suits me,'' declared Ted, rejoicing however that without any suggestion of his he should be assigned to the district where the chance of finding the missing witness would be greatest.

''Arkansas it is, then,'' said the Chief. ''When are you ready to start?''

''This afternoon, if you like,'' replied Ted. ''I have an appointment with the aviation chief, but that will only take an hour or two. Then I'll be off.''

''Going in your own machine, I suppose,'' went on the Chief.

''Sure thing,'' replied Ted.

''Well, that's fine. It's possible, though, that when you get down in the flooded district it will be necessary to change to a seaplane. You may have to settle down on the water oftener than you do on land. But there'll be plenty of Navy planes at your service, and you can take your pick.''

''All the same to me,'' responded Ted, ''though of course it will be a wrench to be

parted from the *Hapworth*. But I know how to handle both kinds and I'll choose the kind most needed at the moment."

"All right then," was the reply. "I'll have everything arranged by four o'clock this afternoon. But if you take off then, you'll be flying by night. Perhaps you'd prefer to wait till morning. It will be safer."

"I'd rather go today," replied Ted. "The night makes no difference to me. My work in the Air Mail service was on a night route, and I'm used to the darkness. And this old earth inductor compass of mine is better than eyes."

Ted hurried over to the Government Aviation Department, and was ushered at once into the presence of the Secretary, by whom he was enthusiastically welcomed.

"Have you come prepared to take that Government position I hinted at in my letter?" asked the Secretary jovially.

"Hardly," returned Ted with a smile.

The Secretary threw up his hands in pretended amazement.

CHAPTER XIII

Winging Through the Night

"Is it possible," exclaimed the Secretary, "that there is one man in the United States that doesn't want a Government office?"

"Not only possible but certain," answered Ted. "Don't think for a moment that I don't appreciate the honor. I do, fully. But I know in my heart that I'm not cut out for office work. My work lies in the open."

"Rather fly than eat, I suppose," smiled the Secretary.

"That's about it," replied Ted, "though you won't find me missing when the mess call sounds."

"Well, I'm sorry," declared the Secretary sincerely. "I'd like to have you with us, not only because of your practical experience in aviation, but because the Government is anxious to honor you because of your amazing exploit. We feel that you've reflected glory on the young manhood of America, and we'd be glad to recognize it officially."

"The Government did that sufficiently when the President pinned the Flying Cross on me," replied Ted, touching the decoration on the lapel of his coat." But though I don't care for an office, I'll always be glad to give any information or suggestions that you may think worth while. Not that I figure they'll count for much," he added modestly.

"Well, if we can't get what we want, we'll take what we can," observed the Secretary. "I'd like to talk to you right now about some of our problems of air transportation. What you saw of that while you were in Europe will be of great service to us."

They plunged at once into the question of commercial transportation and the establishment of airports at various places along the routes, and the Secretary was astounded at the thought that Ted had given to the subject.

"There's another thing I'm interested in," ventured Ted, after they had reached a lull in the discussion.

"What's that?" asked the Secretary with interest.

"The establishment of an airplane station in mid-ocean," answered Ted. "Sounds a little fantastic, perhaps, but I think it could be done."

"The fantastic things of today are the realities of tomorrow," smiled the Secretary.

"Nine-tenths of the things that are being done today would have been called fantastic twenty years ago. Just what is your idea?"

"To have a ship or, shall we say, an immense barge, anchored in the ocean somewhere halfway between America and Europe," answered Ted. "It would have a flying deck on which airplanes could land and from which they could take off. And it would have a workshop on it for the repair of damaged planes and all the necessary fuel, parts and supplies."

"A sort of halfway house that ocean aviators could seek out in time of storm or trouble," mused the Secretary.

"That would be one use for it," replied Ted, "and a very important one. But another would be that an aviator, starting either from America or Europe to cross the ocean, would only have to carry half the fuel he otherwise would at the start. Now he has to carry so much gasoline that there's no room for anything else. If half the weight of that were cut off, he could carry that much more in mail or freight."

"That's the practical slant to it," returned the Secretary, "and it's a good one. But you speak of the ship or barge being anchored. Where would you find in mid-ocean a place shallow enough for an anchorage?"

"There's a place that seems just designed

for that," replied Ted, "and it's about as near midway as would be wanted. Take the distance from St. John's, Newfoundland to Cape Clear, Ireland. That's about eighteen hundred miles.

"Now, there's a bank called Faraday Hills, about seven hundred miles from Cape Clear and nearly eleven hundred miles from St. John's. It's really a range of submerged mountains. The bank runs for about forty miles east and west. The bottom is of coral mud. They've already reached bottom there at about thirty-seven hundred feet. Say, in round numbers, anchorage could be found there at four thousand feet."

"Even that would be pretty deep for a heavy iron or steel cable," objected the Secretary. "Most of the strength of it would be taken up in carrying its own weight."

"That is true," admitted Ted, "but that could be solved by using flexible wire hawsers. Such a hawser would carry its own weight up to a depth of forty thousand feet and still leave an ample margin of strength for holding the ship."

"You seem to have thought up the answer to everything," smiled the Secretary. "Is there any other more suitable anchorage ground than Faraday Hills?"

"No," answered Ted. "There's Flemish

Cap, but that's only three hundred and twenty-five miles east of Newfoundland. It wouldn't be near enough midway. There's a minimum depth of fifty-eight fathoms, but the bank wouldn't be a safe anchorage anyway because it lies within the range of Arctic drift ice. So that's out of the question."

"But how about the ship or barge?" asked the Secretary. "Seems to me it would have to be immense to permit of the landing of planes and furnish a runway for taking off."

"No longer than the Leviathan," declared Ted, "though it would have to be a bit broader. You could allow about four hundred feet of the afterdeck for the planes to come down on. The present airplane carriers find that sufficient. The entire forward part of the flying deck, about five hundred feet in length, could be used for taking off. Or, if necessary, you could use catapults, such as some of our dreadnoughts have now, to shoot the planes out into the air."

"Suppose when the planes got near the ship it should be rocking so in a storm that they could not land on the tossing deck?" asked the Secretary.

"Then they could land on the water in the lee or rear of the vessel and be picked up by cranes," explained Ted.

"How about finding the anchorage ship in case of fog and darkness?" came the question.

"The inductor compass," answered Ted, "and the radio. Then too, the barge would turn on powerful floodlights, searchlights, send up rockets, fire guns and sound its sirens.

"You see," went on Ted, warming to his subject, "there's hardly any limit to the possibilities of the scheme. Not only could the ship help the airmen, but it might, at need, be of aid to disabled steamers or sailing vessels. It would have a complete workshop on board, supplies of food and fuel, a hospital equipment, testing laboratories and the like. There could be experts there for the study of meteorology, oceanography, marine biology. It seems to me that, besides its use for aviation, it could be made to add immensely to the world's general knowledge. But there, I'm talking too much."

"You're talking to a purpose," rejoined the Secretary, "and every word has a punch in it. You're just packed with ideas. You've given me a lot to think about. I'll take the matter up with my associates. Now I'm more sorry than ever that you won't accept office under the Government."

"I'm practically under it already," grinned Ted, as he rose to take his departure. "I'll

have to hurry over to the Red Cross now, if I don't want to be fired."

"Such a chance!" laughed the Secretary, as he shook Ted's hand warmly in farewell.

The Red Cross had drawn up his instructions during his absence. He was to report to Colonel Ashdown, in charge of the Arkansas flooded district, who would assign him his work.

Ted hurried out to Bolling Field where the *Hapworth* was standing with its wings spread, as though anxious to be gone. Ted patted it lovingly.

He made a careful examination of every part of the machine. It was a thing he never neglected. The legend of "luck" that had grown up around his name had never been more misnamed. It was not luck that was responsible for his amazing success. Rather, it was the care and intelligence he put into his preparation for any task, combined with his dauntless courage and skill in flying.

Ted leaped into the cockpit, gave the signal for the blocks to be knocked away and with a wave of his hand and a flash of his inimitable smile at the crowd rushed down the runway and, amid the cheers of the spectators, soared into the skies.

He circled about the lofty top of the Washington Monument and then turned the nose of his plane toward the South.

The afternoon had been clear and sunny, but as the day waned heavy, ominous looking banks of clouds appeared in the sky. And the dusk that followed was heavy with mist, that shortly deepened into a dense, clinging fog.

Everything below Ted was blotted out. Not even the lights of cities over which he passed penetrated that Cimmerian darkness. He might have been a lone traveler in a lost world.

This however did not cause him any great uneasiness, for he had learned from his trip over the Atlantic how fully he might rely on his earth inductor compass, that marvelous instrument that seemed to have almost human intelligence.

Still, he kept a wary eye on his altimeter, for he would have to keep at a great height as he passed over the Blue Ridge mountains, lest he come in contact with some jutting crag.

But what did worry him was the rising power of the wind. Soon it was blowing half a gale. And as the hours went by the storm increased until it became a howling tempest.

Had the wind come from behind him, the young aviator would simply have scudded before the gale. But it seemed to come from all quarters at once. It had a cyclonic quality, and Ted's craft was tossed about like a chip on a cataract.

It was dangerous to cross the mountains at any time, because of the wind currents that swept through the gorges. And now, with this terrific gale raging, the danger was multiplied tenfold.

Few air pilots would have outlived that storm. It tried Ted's mettle to the utmost. All his resources of skill and nerve were called upon for the jockeying of his craft, so as to escape disaster and keep on an even keel.

Dodging, twisting, yielding where yielding was indicated, tacking so as to avoid the most furious of the batterings, searching out above and below strata where there were momentary lulls, Ted fought for hours a fearful battle with the elements.

And when at last he had won out, when the storm, as if despairing of overcoming such a dauntless opponent, had sullenly retreated, growling like a wild beast balked of its prey, Ted was pale and haggard, drenched with perspiration and almost at the last gasp.

Even that storm over the Atlantic had not so thoroughly exhausted him. But, despite his physical and mental weariness, his heart sang within him. He had fought and not flinched; had faced death and come out victor.

And now that the conflict was over he realized that he was hungry. He had not had time to think of food, but now he drank some coffee

that he had brought along in a thermos bottle and munched a couple of sandwiches with relish.

The night wore on. The stars had come out now and the crescent moon peeped over the horizon. Ted relaxed and gave himself up to the sheer peace and beauty of the scene, all the more delightful because of its contrast with Nature in a harsher mood a few hours before.

He was making good time and the *Hapworth* was roaring through the night at a rate of more than a hundred miles an hour.

Gradually the dawn appeared, first as a mere lifting of the darkness, then as a pearl gray light stealing across the sky, to be succeeded by rosy tints until the whole horizon broke into flame.

Rousing himself from the contemplation of the glorious spectacle, Ted turned his eyes downward.

He gave a violent start.

Had his compass failed him? Had the storm driven him off the coast? Was he over the Atlantic?

Far below him stretched what seemed to be a shoreless sea!

CHAPTER XIV

The Tumbling Waters

For a moment Ted Scott was filled with bewilderment and consternation. Then the truth burst upon him.

He had reached the region of the flood!

His heart almost stood still at the sight.

He swooped down until he was riding at a height of about two hundred feet. From there he could sense more clearly the terrible meaning of the appalling disaster that had fallen upon that section of the country.

For now he could see the spires of churches lifting themselves at intervals above the surface. And there were the tops of trees that bespoke patches of woodland now engulfed. And here and there were houses that had been lifted from their foundations and were drifting with the current. And mingled with these were the dead and swollen bodies of horses, cattle, sheep and domestic animals, only a few of the many thousands that had met a similar fate.

It was a sight to chill the blood, and Ted's hand was trembling as it rested on the controls. He had read of these things, but had not been able to visualize them.

Now he sensed to some degree the tremendous proportions of the tragedy. And he felt with a sinking of the heart that still more terrible things remained to be seen.

He thanked heaven that he had yielded to the impulse to enroll in the noble army of the flood fighters.

Ted consulted his compass, for now that all landmarks had been blotted out, that was his sole reliance.

He had been directed to report at the city of Gordonville, near the center of the flooded district, a place located on ground sufficiently high to be out of reach of the flood.

He took his bearings carefully and pointed the nose of his plane in the direction indicated. But he had hard work to keep his eyes on the instruments, for a dreadful fascination drew them ever below to that waste of swirling waters.

At intervals, he would catch sight of some point of high land, on which were standing what seemed to be small cities of tents. In these were huddled the miserable refugees, who had fled there from the wild inrush of the Mississippi.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he caught sight of what he knew must be Gordonville, the city of his destination. Soon he was hovering above it, looking for a place to land.

There was no regular flying field, but he caught sight of a meadow, reasonably smooth, where a number of other airplanes were resting, and he made for this.

He circled about it once or twice and then, having selected a suitable spot, he guided his plane down to a graceful landing.

Scarcely had he brought it to a stop than he was surrounded by pilots and mechanics of the other planes, as well as a considerable sprinkling of soldiers and civilians.

One tall man in uniform, who bore an air of authority, came up and extended his hand.

"This, I suppose, is Ted Scott," he said in a tone of warm welcome.

"No one else," returned Ted with a smile, as he grasped the extended hand, "and I take it this is Colonel Ashdown, to whom I was directed to report."

"Yes," replied the colonel, "and I can't tell you how glad we are to have such an addition to our forces. It sent a sort of electric thrill through all the poor people of this district when the word flashed that Ted Scott was coming They've got so accustomed to thinking you can do anything that, on my word, I think half

of them will be expecting you to stop the flood."

Ted laughed.

"They're in for an awful flop in their good opinion of me," he said. "I hope I needn't tell you how glad I'll be to do anything you tell me to that will help. Send me anywhere. Tell me to do anything."

"I'll give you plenty of work," the colonel promised. "But first you must get a little sleep. You've been flying all through the night."

"Sleep be hanged!" replied Ted. "I can have plenty of time for that later on. I want to start going at once."

"I might have known you'd say something of that kind," replied the colonel. "Have it your own way. Come with me now to my quarters. I want you to have lunch with me and the other officers in charge, and while we're eating I'll try to put you next to the real conditions here and the things that are necessary first to be done. Let me see, you handle a seaplane as well as an airplane, don't you?"

"Either one," replied Ted. "It makes no difference to me. Just let me get my hands on the joystick, and then you forget about the rest."

"I'm glad of that," replied the colonel," for you may have to change from one to the other

frequently, dependent upon the work we have in hand. Sometimes you'll have to land on a levee, at other times on the water."

They made their way to headquarters through a constantly growing crowd the members of which looked at Ted with curiosity and admiration and sought to grasp his hand.

Arriving there, Ted had a bath and refreshed himself, and then sat down at the officers' mess for lunch. The officers were a fine, upstanding lot of fellows, but they were wan and haggard with work and strain, and there was very little of the spic and span appearance usually associated with their class. The work at hand was too grim and harrowing for them to pay much regard to formalities.

"You saw something of the devastation caused by the flood on your way down," said Colonel Ashdown to Ted. "But it will be many days before you will be able to grasp the real horror of the situation. The people up North don't begin to realize it. Why, it's an empire that is under water. Millions and millions of acres, thousands of farms and villages, hundreds of thousands of people forced to flee from their homes with nothing but the clothes on their backs! Live stock swept away, houses uprooted, crops ruined, families separated, children crying for their parents, moth-

ers weeping for their children, fathers struggling desperately to keep their little broods together!"

"It does tear at one's heart," said Ted soberly. "It's a terrible disaster."

"The most terrible of this century, except the World War," affirmed the colonel. "There's nothing more fearful than the rage of the waters. Fire is nothing compared with it. Despite all we can do, the Mississippi seems to be laughing at us. We check it at one place, only to have it break through another. We're pygmies fighting against a giant."

"Fighting gallantly though," returned Ted. "The Red Cross and the Army have done wonders. The whole country is ringing with stories of bravery and self-sacrifice."

"They're doing their best," agreed the colonel, "and so are the volunteer engineers, nurses, aviators and a host of others. And then too, the afflicted people are not lying back and relying on outside aid, but are working like beavers to help themselves. The first thing that an able-bodied man does after seeing his family in safety is to pitch in at any work that comes to hand. Hundreds of thousands are working on the levees and at other jobs. Why, even the convicts are working, and willingly, to the full limit of their strength. But it's a mammoth task that is set for them."

They pushed back their chairs and rose from the table.

"Come along with me," said the colonel, "and I'll show you the work I'd like to have you do first."

Ted went with him to the water's edge, where there were a number of seaplanes floating like so many swans and moored to an extemporized dock.

"Are you familiar with radio?" asked the colonel.

"Sure thing," replied Ted. "I can send as well as receive. But the *Hapworth* hasn't any radio equipment."

"That's a thing that can be easily remedied," replied the colonel. "I'll see that the equipment is installed tonight. You see the work I want you to do just now is this: I want you to sail about in your plane in a radius of ten or fifteen miles, with Gordonville as the center. At a height of, say, two hundred feet, you can easily see what's going on beneath you. Here and there you'll see some little bit of higher land that the waters haven't yet covered. On this there'll probably be a few families that have sought refuge there. Note its position as accurately as you can, and let me know where it is. Then I'll send a launch or skiff or any boat I have at hand and have the people taken off and brought here. When you

once have the radio installed, you can use that for your messages. But today you can make several trips, if necessary, coming back at intervals and going out again. Tomorrow and other days you can stay in the air practically all the time. You see, I'm taking you at your word and mapping out a full program."

They parted then, and Ted hurried back to the meadow where he had left the *Hapworth.* He examined it carefully to see if it had sustained any damage in the terrific storm of the night before. But it was staunch and uninjured, and, after filling his gasoline tanks, Ted took off and started on his errand of mercy.

All through that long afternoon he swept here and there in a wide circle, his hawklike eyes scanning the surface of the turbulent flood. And again and again those eyes were rewarded by detecting many isolated spots of higher ground on which were a few, and, in some cases, many people, who had been marooned there and were watching with frightened eyes the water mounting higher and higher, as though to sweep them from their last place of refuge.

With the *Hapworth's* speed it was a matter of only a few minutes for Ted to race back to headquarters with his information, and at once boats would be dispatched to the rescue.

It was nearing dusk when he caught sight of a part of a levee that was still standing. It

seemed to be about five hundred feet in length.

The water had broken through above and below it, and was rushing in a torrent through the crevasses thus formed. That part of the levee had become an island.

And as Ted swooped down nearer, he could see that even that small portion of the levee was swaying and trembling under the impact of the waters. At any moment it might topple into the flood.

And then, in the gathering darkness, he discovered to his horror three figures on that slender stretch of ground. He looked more closely and could see a man and woman and a baby.

The man was lying on the ground as though in a stupor. The woman was holding the baby in one arm and gesticulating frantically at the plane with the other.

What was to be done? Just one thing.

Ted knew that long before he could report and send a boat the levee would be down.

He must land on that levee that was already tottering to its fall!

CHAPTER XV

On the Edge of Peril

It was characteristic of Ted Scott that, once having made up his mind as to the thing to be done, he did it on the instant.

He knew the awful risk he took. If the levee went crashing down with the plane upon it, he would be engulfed in a seething whirlpool, with perhaps one chance in a hundred of surviving.

But that did not make him hesitate for a moment. Three lives besides his own were in the balance.

He ran his eye along the slender path, measured the distance carefully and brought the *Hapworth* down on it. The plane ran along with Ted slowing it all he could, until it had come within a few yards of the roaring torrent at one end. Then, just as the young aviator was fearing that it would go over the edge, it stopped.

In a twinkling Ted was out of the cockpit and running toward the little group. The man had not stirred, and Ted wondered whether he

were dead. But the woman, holding the baby, ran to meet him, her face streaming with tears.

"Oh, you must be an angel from heaven," she sobbed. "God has heard my prayers! Oh, my poor husband! My precious baby! You will save them?" and she burst into frantic weeping.

"Sure I'll save them," declared Ted stoutly, though even as he spoke the levee was shaking beneath him as if in the throes of earthquake. "What's the matter with your husband? Has he fainted?"

"He's sick," wailed the woman. "He's been wandering in his mind and now he's in a stupor. Oh, help him, help him!"

"I will," said Ted. "You run to the plane and put the baby in it. Then run back and help me get your husband to it. Quick, now, quick!"

The woman did as directed, and Ted seized the man by the shoulder and shook him violently.

"Wake up! Wake up!" he shouted. "Get up on your feet. Here, I'll help you."

The man opened his eyes and looked at him bewilderedly.

"Can't—can't get up," he murmured, and closed his eyes again.

"You must!" cried Ted. "Here," to the woman, who now came running toward him. "Help to get him on his feet."

Together they pulled the man to a standing position, but his legs sagged under him.

"No use, no good," he muttered vacantly.

"Oh, John," begged the woman. "For my sake! For the baby's sake! Try! Try!"

Thus adjured, the man made an effort, which, after a step or two, ended again in failure.

Ted waited no longer. The levee was swaying drunkenly now.

"Run to the plane," he shouted to the woman.

Bending down, he lifted the man as though he had been a sack of wheat and threw him over his shoulder.

Then he staggered as rapidly as he could to the plane and, with the woman's help, bestowed him in the cockpit.

When the plane had come to a stop, Ted had described a half circle, so that it now headed away from the nearer of the two crevasses and he had a clear run ahead of him for the takeoff.

He started the motor going, made a flying leap for the fuselage as the plane got under way, just barely making it, and guided the *Hapworth* along the levee.

But now the narrow strip of land was rolling so violently that half the time the plane was on one wheel. That run was one that Ted never forgot. It had all the qualities of a nightmare.

He tried to lift the plane after it had gone a hundred yards. It rose a few feet and again

came down. A hundred feet further, he tried again. But, with its unusual load, it needed more.

Again it came down!

Behind there was a roar as of a hundred cannon. Ted could not turn to look, but he knew what had happened. Part of the levee had toppled into the flood!

Only a hundred feet more of solid earth. Before him foamed and roared the crevasse.

Could he make it? Or was he rushing straight to doom in that fearful torrent?

Within ten feet of the edge he lifted it again. It wavered, seemed in doubt as to whether to go up or come down. Then it rose, slowly but surely, skimming the top of the crevasse so nearly that the plane and its inmates were drenched with spray.

Ted had made it! It had been a terribly close call but he had made it.

He glanced back just in time to see the balance of the levee fall with a thunderous crash into the flood. Where it had been was now a waste of surging waters.

With his heart full of thanksgiving, Ted glanced at the other inmates of the crowded cockpit.

The woman was sitting with her husband's head in her lap, smoothing the disordered hair from the flushed face. The baby, seated on th-

floor, looked up into Ted's face. Ted smiled at it. The baby crowed.

Ted felt a queer moisture in his eyes. This would never do. He needed clear eyes to guide the plane.

The woman from time to time tried to say something that would express her gratitude, but Ted could hear nothing above the roaring of the motor.

It was fully dark now, but Ted could see the beacon light that indicated the position of the Gordonville field, and in a few minutes he was hovering above it.

He made his landing, and called for volunteers to lift the unconscious man from the plane. This was done quickly, and the man conveyed to the field hospital.

Ted helped the woman out and lifted the baby in his arms. The little one cuddled up to him, and Ted carried him as he accompanied the woman to the refugees' camp.

"I can never, never thank you enough," she said brokenly. "You are so brave! And you took your life in your hands when you didn't have to."

"That's just it," smiled Ted. "I *did* have to. It was my job. But now you and your family are all safe and together again."

"Oh no, not all," said the woman, bursting

into tears. "My little Emily! My little Emily!"

Ted was startled.

"Do you mean that one of your children is missing?" he asked.

"Yes," sobbed the woman. "My little Emily, seven years old. She was with us on the roof the night our house was swept away. A tree floated by, and the branches brushed her off into the water. My husband dived for her again and again and swam around until he was exhausted and I had to pull him up on the roof. He was nearly crazy and so was I. In the pitch darkness we could see nothing. I screamed and screamed and there was no answer. She must be dead. My precious, precious little girl!"

Ted's heart was profoundly stirred.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," he said, "But you mustn't give up hope yet. She may have been caught in the branches of the trees and floated along until a boat perhaps discovered her and took her off."

But the bereaved mother shook her head sadly.

She wept pitifully, and Ted, though he tried in his clumsy way, could find no words to comfort her.

"Remember that you still have your husband and your baby," he reminded her.

"Yes," she replied, "but I don't know how long I will have my husband. He's dreadfully ill. He was poorly when the flood came, and the terrible strain and the sorrow at losing Emily have sent him into a fever. He must have hurt his head, too, against a log while he was swimming around, for soon after he got back on the roof he began to mutter and babble things that had no sense. Then towards morning the house bumped against that levee where you saw us. I managed to get off the roof with the baby and then I pulled my husband off. He was in a stupor then, just as he has been since."

They had reached now the edge of the refugees' camp. Before one of the food stations was standing a long line of children, with their little tin pannikins to be filled with the steaming food.

There was a scream and a little golden-haired girl darted out of the line.

"Mother! Mother!" she cried.

"Emily! My darling child!" shrieked Ted's companion, as she gathered the little girl into her arms.

CHAPTER XVI

Scaly Enemies

It was a scene of wild and unrestrained emotion, as mother and daughter clung to each other in an ecstasy of joy that communicated itself to all beholders. There were few dry eyes in the multitude that quickly gathered about the reunited pair.

When they could talk coherently, the little girl told of her adventures. When she had felt herself swept off into the water, she had grasped instinctively at the branches, and had been borne into a fork of the tree that held her above the surface. She had heard her mother's screams and tried to answer, but in her fright her little voice had failed to carry above the growlings of the flood. The tree had been rapidly carried away from the floating house and lost in the darkness.

All through the night she had crouched there in terror, until, when dawn came, some boatmen had seen and rescued her. They had brought her to the Gordonville camp, where she had

been grieving her heart out at the supposed loss of her parents and her little baby brother.

But now they were together again, and their joy was beyond all words. And again and again Ted was overwhelmed with expressions of gratitude until, in sheer embarrassment, he slipped away into the darkness.

"Some take-off that was of yours from the toppling levee," Colonel Ashdown remarked to Ted at breakfast the next morning.

"How did you hear about it?" asked Ted.

For in his report the night before he had simply mentioned that he had found three persons marooned on a small section of land and had brought them to Gordonville in his plane.

"How did I hear?" laughed the colonel. "Why, the whole camp has been ringing with it. I guess that woman you saved has been talking all night about it. I know she was going strong when taps sounded. To hear her tell it, you're a combination of all the heroes that have lived since Adam."

Ted flushed.

"It was all very simple," he said. "I found them there and took them off. The levee was a little shaky, but I got off all right."

"But you landed on it when it was threatening at every instant to topple over," persisted the colonel.

"I had to land somewhere," Ted replied.

The colonel laughed.

"No cornering you," he chuckled. "You absolutely refuse to be a hero. But the reporters have been eating up the story, and you'd better duck before they get you in their clutches."

"I'll duck," grinned Ted, getting up from the table. "Those reporters are nice lads, but they give me the willies sometimes. How about my plane? Is the radio in?"

"Had it installed last night," replied the colonel. "I guess you'll find everything in good working order."

Ted found that this was correct when he got out to the field. He tested the instruments and found that they were of the best. He was delighted at this, for he had been irked the day before by the time he had to waste in his frequent trips back to headquarters.

Now he could devote all his time to the work of rescue. A few taps of the radio, giving location and particulars, and he knew that as soon as the message had been received boats would be pushing out towards the forlorn and anguished people.

Never had his sympathies been so severely taxed. His heart bled at the poignant sights of which he was the hourly witness. Many times he saw the bodies of men, women and children floating upon the waters, their unsee-

ing eyes turned toward the sky. And the animals that had been drowned were legion.

Even their fate, however, was better than that of some of their kind. On one isolated spot of ground where Ted landed, thinking that some sick people might be in the abandoned houses, he found only two dogs surviving. About them were the bodies of pigs and other dogs, eaten to the bones.

The facts were obvious. The dogs, ravenous with hunger, had killed and eaten the pigs. Then, when these were gone, the dogs had turned on each other, until only the strongest remained alive. And similar scenes were doubtless being enacted in scores of other places. It was a saturnalia of pain and death.

Even the inanimate things tossed about on the flood had a pathos of their own. Shattered houses rolled to and fro on the waves. Once they had been abodes of light and cheer, of joy and laughter, of peace and love. They had been *homes,* with all that word implies. Now they were broken masses of timber.

Doll carriages that had once been the proud possession of some little girls, rocking horses on which small boys had ridden, shouting with glee, all the melancholy reminders of the happiness that once had been drifted by in a welter of confusion.

Ted had to thrust these things resolutely into

the back of his mind, or they would have unmanned him.

He sought surcease from the pain in his heart by work. No one of all that army of volunteer workers was more indefatigable than he. From dawn till dark and often long afterward he worked unceasingly, often making personal rescues like his first, sometimes descending to lend a hand on some threatened levee, doing whatever was most pressing, until, when night came, he was so weary that he could hardly climb out of his plane.

Many a night he went without sleep altogether, helping in the hospital wards of the refugees' camp, subduing delirious patients and doing other work that taxed the nurses too severely, laboring until he was ready to drop and the colonel was moved to protest.

"Not too much, not too much, Scott," he said. "You're already doing two or three men's work. You're only human, my boy. You've got to let up before you kill yourself."

"Don't worry, colonel," laughed Ted. "I'm far from being a dead man yet. And I'll have plenty of time to rest later on."

A week had passed when one day, while aloft, he noticed that his engine was missing. He was a good many miles off from the flying field, and he did not want to take the time necessary for return. He was a superb mechanic,

as well as pilot, and he knew that he could do himself what little overhauling was required.

A little way off he noticed an island of two or three acres in extent. He scanned it narrowly first for any trace of human beings and satisfied himself that there were none.

Then he sized it up as a landing field. It seemed promising enough. Apart from one clump of trees, it was fairly level and reasonably smooth. He had made many a landing under worse conditions.

He jockeyed the *Hapworth* until he had picked out a satisfactory stretch of ground and then came down, landing with scarcely a jar.

He brought the plane to a stop in the shadow of the clump of trees, as he wanted to do his tinkering where he would be protected from the rays of the sun, that were beating down fiercely.

He had rolled up his sleeves and was bending over the motor when a queer rustling made him turn his head around.

Up from the water's edge a monster alligator was coming swiftly toward him!

CHAPTER XVII

Treed

For a moment Ted Scott's heart seemed to cease beating.

The huge brute was the largest he had ever seen. Its scaly hide was dripping with the water from which it had just emerged. Its jaws were snapping, and its fiery eyes glowed with malignity.

Ted's paralysis endured but for an instant. The next he had leaped for a low-lying bough of the nearest tree and swung himself up into the branches.

And not a moment too soon, for the snap of those hideous jaws barely missed his left foot as he drew it up.

Then the brute reared itself up and tried to get at the bough to pull Ted down within his reach. But it fell short by a few inches and, bellowing with rage, dropped down with a thud.

It circled the tree clumsily, as though to see if there were not some other way of reaching

its intended victim. Baffled and disappointed, it relinquished its efforts after a while and turned its attention to the plane.

It sniffed about it on all sides regarding it suspiciously. Ted was on tenterhooks, lest an angry sweep of that serrated tail should seriously damage his beloved machine. But as the *Hapworth* remained motionless, the monster dismissed the idea that it might have hostile intentions, and again turned its eyes on its human captive.

The young aviator was in a quandary. For the moment he was safe. He thanked his stars that alligators could not climb. But what if the brute should camp there, deciding to starve him out!

And his consternation increased when he saw two other alligators, attracted no doubt by the bellowing of the first, waddle up out of the water and stand blinking about until their eyes had sought out Ted in the tree.

Then, with expectant grunts, they started to come forward to get their share of the expected prey.

But this was not in the calculations of the giant who had first appeared upon the scene. He wanted to make his kill alone, and he speedily made his intentions manifest.

With a fierce bellow he rushed toward the unwelcome intruders. They bellowed defiance

in return and it seemed at first as though they would stand their ground.

But their courage quailed at the size and ferocity of the onrushing saurian, and they deemed discretion the better part of valor. They turned tail and made for the water, into which they plumped with a splash and sank out of sight.

The winner of the bloodless victory glared at the place where the others had disappeared and then returned to the tree, its temper in no way improved by the incident. There it settled down to play a waiting game.

Ted was a prey to serious apprehension. No one knew just where he was, and there was no way of notifying them, since he was debarred from use of the radio. Even if aviators should happen to hover over the spot, they could not descry him in the tree. Nor could they see the plane, because of the overhanging branches that shielded it from sight.

He might be marooned there for days until he was weak and faint from starvation. He might in the end lose consciousness and drop down to those gaping jaws.

There was a chance, of course, that the brute might grow tired of the long and apparently fruitless vigil and go off in search of easier prey. But its ferocity had been aroused by the narrow margin by which it had been balked of

its victim, and it might stay there for days. Its animal instinct would tell it that, sooner or later, the man would have to succumb.

For two hours or more the alligator lay there, most of the time with its fiery eyes fixed on Ted. Then it seemed to grow somnolent, and it closed its eyes and rested its head on the ground.

A gleam of hope came to Ted. If the monster should really sleep, it might be possible to slip down noiselessly from the tree, gain the plane, set the motor going and be off before the bewildered brute could realize that the captive was escaping.

He nursed that hope for a full half hour, during which the alligator hardly stirred.

Then Ted, with infinite precautions, inch by inch, began to let himself down from the tree.

Despite all his care, a twig snapped. Instantly one eye of the brute opened and fixed itself on Ted. Then with a bellow it started up, and Ted hastily withdrew to his former perch.

No, that would not do. Either the alligator had been shamming, or its senses were so on the alert that the least sound sufficed to arouse it.

Ted was bitterly disappointed. In what a prison he was! And with what a jailer!

And now he noted with consternation that the water was creeping up on the island.

Already a considerable part of the fringe of the isolated spot of ground had disappeared. There was barely space now for a take-off even if he were in the plane. A little while longer and a take-off would be no longer possible.

Then the water would sweep over the island, the tree would probably be uprooted and fall, and the alligator would be rewarded for its long waiting.

Ted was desperate. Death was beginning to creep near to him. And such a death! He looked at those hideous jaws and shuddered.

If he only had a weapon! With a rifle at that close range he could have sent a bullet through one of those malignant eyes straight to the brain. But what was the use of wishing?

His hand touched a protuberance in his jacket pocket. It was the heavy wrench with which he had been about to work at the motor. Little help in that!

In his belt was a long and powerful knife, that he had used for cutting ropes, branches and other things when at work on the levees.

Useful in their way, but jokes when it came to fighting with an alligator. A knife and a wrench! He was almost tempted into a lugubrious smile.

But wait! The wrench! He took it from his pocket, hefted it in his hand.

A thought had come to him.

He knew that the alligator's eye was its vulnerable point.

The wrench would be of no use in a hand to hand combat. But might it not serve as a missile? Might it not wound the alligator so that, while it was distracted with the pain, he could have a chance to regain the plane?

It was the counsel of desperation, a forlorn hope. But it was all that he had. And the water was creeping up faster and faster.

Ted grasped the wrench firmly, let himself down as far as he dared and shouted.

The alligator answered with a bellow of defiance and reared itself upward.

It was the moment!

With all the power of his muscular arm Ted hurled the heavy wrench directly into the left eye of the brute.

There was a tremendous roar of surprise and pain, and the monster rolled over and over, clawing at its head.

Like a flash Ted dropped to the ground and rushed toward the plane.

He had almost reached it when a lunge of the alligator's tail caught him. Had it struck him full, it would have broken his leg or rendered him unconscious. But though it was merely the tip that hit him, it threw him for several feet and he rolled over and over.

And when, confused and dizzy, he scrambled

to his feet, it was to see the beast coming toward him with open mouth.

Ted turned and ran for his life!

With a speed surprising in so clumsy a brute, the alligator pursued him. If it had not been for the blood that obscured its sight, it would infallibly have caught him.

As it was, Ted had all he could do to keep out of range of those terrible teeth. He dodged, twisted and doubled in his tracks.

He might be able to keep this up a few minutes longer. Already his breath was coming in sobbing gasps. He knew that the alligator could keep it up for hours.

Was this to be the end?

Twice in the course of that awful chase he reached the plane, but not with margin enough to start the motor going, for the beast was close on his heels.

And now as Ted's strength waned the ominous pad pad behind him came nearer. He felt for the knife at his belt and whirled about.

The brute reared up to seize him. Almost blindly, Ted drove the knife into its open jaws!

CHAPTER XVIII

From the Jaws of Death

The alligator's jaws started to close.

But they did not close!

For the knife, wrenched from Ted's hands by the force of the blow, stood upright in the lower jaw, with the heavy haft pressed against the upper jaw.

So that the harder the brute tried to close its mouth the deeper it drove the knife into the lower jaw, and the pain caused it to desist.

It could not even bellow, but rolled over and over, trying vainly to dislodge the knife and forgetting for the moment all about its enemy.

Dazed for a moment, scarcely daring to believe in his good fortune, Ted roused himself and dashed toward the motor. He started it roaring, leaped into the cockpit and was off.

And it was high time, for it was only on the very edge of the water that the gallant plane lifted and soared upward.

To his delight, the motor now seemed to run smoothly. The young aviator came to the con-

clusion that some dirt or water in the gasoline had caused the temporary trouble.

Ted cast one glance downward, saw his late enemy still thrashing and floundering on the ground, and, with a heart full of thanksgiving for his narrow escape, set his course for home. It was growing dark, and for once he was content to call it a day.

After mess that night, he was passing through the camp of refugees when he came across an old negro, who was essaying a task that seemed to be too heavy for him. Ted lent him a hand, and the old fellow was profuse in his thanks.

"Yo' ez sho' mahty good ter an ole cullud man," he said gratefully.

"Oh, that's nothing," answered Ted carelessly. "This is a time when everybody ought to help everybody else."

"Yassah, yassah," the other acquiesced, "an' dere's plenty uv helpin' ter do."

"Don't suppose you ever remember as big a flood as this," remarked Ted.

"Nuffin ebber bin lak et," was the response. "Dere's bin menny er time wen de old Mississipp' hez up an' gorn on er rampage, an' ah's gittin' used ter floatin' aroun' en mah cabin. But dis time ez wuss dan et ebber wuz. Me an' mah ole woman jist got frew bah de skin uv der teef. Yassah, bah de skin of der teef. T'ought mo' dan wunst we wuz goin' ter see

de pearly gates an' hear de anjuls singin'."

He laughed a rich, unctuous laugh.

"But we's here yit," he went on. "'Tain't time yit fur ole Jefferson Pepp ter play on de gol'en hahp—"

Ted started.

"Jefferson Pepp!" he exclaimed. "Is that your name?"

"Dat's wut de preacher chris'ened dis ole darkey," the man answered, visibly surprised by Ted's exclamation.

"Look here," demanded Ted, "do you know a man named Claiborne?"

"Duz ah know 'im?" was the reply. "Why, 'e's mah massa. Ah shud say ah did know 'im. Why, ah wuz bohn on de Claiborne plantashun, an' so wuz mah mammy an' mah gran'mammy. Ah wuz er pickaninny dere w'en Massa Bob wuz bohn. Dere ain't enny bigger quality folks in Arkansas dan de Claibornes," he added with an air of pride.

Ted could scarcely believe his ears, but he was not yet certain.

"Has your 'massa,' as you call him, ever been up North?" he asked eagerly.

"Yassah," replied Jefferson Pepp. "'E wuz up dere fur er few years at er place named Caxton. But dat wuz er good w'ile ago. Ah wuz wiv 'im too, fur yer doan' ketch ole massa goin' ennyw'ere wivout ole Jeff taggin' along."

"What was he doing while he was up there?" questioned Ted, now morally certain that he was on the right track.

Jeff scratched his woolly head.

"Ah doan 'zac'ly know," he replied, "cep'n et wuz somethin' doin' wiv de co'thouse. Ah nebber boddered mah haid 'bout dat. All ah hed ter do wuz ter keep massa comfor'ble."

"Where is Major Claiborne—he was a major, wasn't he?—now?" asked Ted.

" 'E's er majer," answered Jeff. "All de Claibornes wuz majers or kunnels, w'en dey wuzn't ginerals. Ah lef' 'im at de ole plantashun. 'E's mahty obstinate, de majer. Ah begged 'im ter kum away, but 'e wudn't leab 'is race hosses. T'ought 'e'd be able ter git 'em away on er barge or somethin'. Ah wanted ter stay wiv 'im, but 'e tole me ter go or 'e'd knock mah ole haid off. 'E wuz laffin w'en 'e sed et. On'y de good Lord knows w're e' ez now. Mahty stubbo'n, de majer. Yassah, mahty, stubbo'n."

"Where is this plantation?" Ted pressed him.

" 'Bout thutty, fohty miles fum heah," answered Jeff, with a negro's vagueness as to distance. "Up in Washin'ton County."

"What is the nearest town to the Claiborne place?" asked Ted.

"Lamberton," was the reply, "but et wuz mos'ly unner watah wen ah lef'."

"Thank you, Jeff," said Ted. "You've done more for me than you know. I'll see you later."

He left the old fellow hastily and repaired to headquarters, where he got more definite information as to the location of Lamberton.

It proved to be in the Gordonville district, and Ted had no difficulty in being assigned on the morrow to scouting duty in that locality.

He was up at the break of dawn and, after a hasty breakfast, took the *Hapworth* up into the air and headed toward Lamberton.

In less than half an hour he was hovering over what he had reason to believe was the town he was seeking. That is, it had at one time been a town. Now it was completely covered with water to the depth of at least twenty feet. Abandoned houses tossed about crazily on the flood. Débris of all kinds littered the waters. Two steeples of churches towered above the surface, pointing toward the skies as though to say that only there could comfort and help be found in that awful devastation.

Ted circled about in a sweep of five miles, somewhere within which the Claiborne plantation should have been. But the surrounding country had shared the fate of the town. Every-

thing was under water, except the cupola of one of the largest houses.

Not a living thing came under his eyes. A silence as of death brooded over the scene. Either the inhabitants had been rescued, or they were beyond all need of rescue.

Where was Major Claiborne? Had he been saved? Or had he perished with the beloved racehorses for which he had risked his life?

Ted sailed about until he had convinced himself that further search was useless. Then he sadly gave up the quest and returned to Gordonville for further orders.

He was unspeakably depressed. It was the very irony of fate that he should be balked of getting the knowledge that meant so much to his foster parents at the very moment that hope had been revived within him.

He had just made his landing on the Gordonville field when he heard yells of alarm and saw people running and pointing upward.

He leaped out and looked where they were pointing. And what he saw stabbed him to the heart.

High up in the clouds was a plane in flames!

CHAPTER XIX

The Burning Plane

Ted Scott recognized the machine in an instant. It was a large biplane, one of the biggest of the Gordonville squadron.

And he knew, too, the pilot and the mechanic who flew it. The former was Jack Emmet, a particular friend of his, who had formerly been in the Air Mail service on the route from St. Louis to Chicago. And the latter was Tom Ralston, a genial favorite of the flying field, kindly, helpful and as brave as a lion.

Ted's heart seemed to miss a beat. These men were pals of his, had eaten, laughed and chatted with him. Only yesterday they had been exchanging experiences. And now they were up in the clouds in a burning plane, facing a terrible death and facing it without hope of succor! No human help could come to them.

But couldn't it?

The next moment Ted was running toward his plane, only a few yards distant.

He had no clear idea of what he could do.

But he must go up, up to that flaming holocaust. Perhaps a plan would come to him as he flew.

As he shot up with meteoric swiftness, he found himself wondering why the men had not jumped. They were at such a height that each could undoubtedly have made a safe landing with a parachute.

At every instant he feared to see the plane come whirling down, carrying its occupants to death. But the flames had evidently not reached the steering mechanism, and the biplane kept describing wide spirals on a comparatively even keel.

As Ted drew nearer he descried the figures of Jack and Tom. They had crept out on a wing of the plane, which, owing to fire-proofing, had so far held off the attacks of the flame. But even now the wing was smouldering.

And then Ted knew why the men had not jumped, for he could see that the parachutes, strapped to their backs, were charred to shreds and worthless.

And now Ted had gotten on the windward side of the plane, so that the flaming fragments that filled the air in the vicinity could not find lodgment on or in the *Hapworth*.

He was near enough to see the haggard, drawn expressions on the faces of Jack and Tom, as they held desperately to their frail support.

There was not even hope in those faces. They had seen Ted coming, and no doubt their hearts had leaped for a moment with the thought that death might even yet be thwarted. But the thought had died as soon as it had been born. For what could Ted do for them?

A moment later and the question was answered.

In the cockpit of the *Hapworth* was a coil of rope that Ted had found use for many times in rescuing victims of the flood. Now it was to play a different role.

Ted drew as near as he could to the biplane and a little above it. Then he lifted a round of the rope and waved it at the hapless men.

They grasped his meaning instantly.

The next moment Ted had hurled the coil of rope. It hissed through the air and fell over the wings.

Like a flash, Jack, who was the nearer of the two, had grasped it and slipped a noose of it under his arms. Tom was almost equally quick in making and adjusting a similar noose.

As soon as Ted saw that they were ready, he rose higher to take in the slack. But even as he did so, the burning plane collapsed and plunged earthward, and the men fell with it till brought up suddenly at the end of the rope.

They swayed in a wide arc through space, and Ted was in terror lest the rope should

yield to the strain. But it held, and at last stretched taut directly beneath the plane.

There were a few tense moments while Ted sought to gain control of the *Hapworth,* which was shaking and diving from this disturbance to its equilibrium. But he mastered it at last, though even then all his craftsmanship was called into play to make the right adjustments. Then he began to descend slowly in wide, sweeping spirals.

And as he went, his mind was working with lightning rapidity. The danger was by no means over. He had to make a landing. But where?

Not on the land. The men would be crushed beneath the plane, or battered and bruised as they were being dragged along with it.

Nor in the water, for the *Hapworth* was not a seaplane. And even if it were, the men would be forced beneath the surface as he came down.

He drew near the landing place at Gordonville, yet keeping about a hundred yards off shore.

He could see that the banks were black with people, for practically all the population of the place had been apprised of that thrilling battle for life going on in the clouds, and were watching breathlessly, with tears and moans and cheers and prayers.

When he was at a height of about two hun-

dred feet, Ted leaned over and gesticulated, pointing to the fleet of boats and then at the water beneath him.

There was a hurry and bustle in the throng, and then several boats shot up and disposed themselves at intervals about the water beneath the plane.

They had understood.

Slowly, with infinite precautions, Ted brought the plane down, until the end of the rope to which the men were hanging was within a few feet of the water and midway between two of the boats.

Then he picked up a hatchet from the floor of the cockpit, waved it at the men in the boats so that they would know what he was about to do, and cut the rope.

The men fell with a splash in the shallow water, and in a moment the boats had darted to them and rescuers lifted them from the water and conveyed them to the shore.

The *Hapworth,* relieved of its burden, rose like a bird, and Ted turned its nose in the direction of the flying field, unheeding the wild chorus of cheers that rose from thousands of throats.

When he tried to step out of the cockpit, his legs gave way under him and he sank down on the ground.

He was all in. The reaction was terrific.

That awful battle with death had shaken him to the core.

But he had conquered! Death had slunk away, beaten. And Tom and Jack, good old Tom and Jack, were saved!

He staggered to his feet and tried to walk. But he did not have to walk.

For by this time he was the center of a cheering, crazy mob that lifted him on their shoulders and carried him in triumph to headquarters.

Colonel Ashdown wrung his hand. For a moment he did not trust himself to speak. And when he did, there was a most unmilitary moisture in his eyes and a most unmilitary break in his voice.

"Finest thing I ever saw," he said.

"Nonsense," returned Ted.

"Don't say 'nonsense' to me, sir," retorted the colonel, blowing his nose vigorously. "I'm your commanding officer, and I say it was the finest thing I ever saw. Now dare to contradict me."

"All right, sir," grinned Ted. "You're my boss. You win."

CHAPTER XX

A Sinister Shape

Despite the strain under which he had been, Ted Scott took but an hour for rest, and then again was off on his errands of rescue.

The day was filled with arduous work, and it was not till after a late supper at night that he was able to go to the field hospital and see how Tom and Jack were getting along.

He found them in bed, swathed with bandages. The nurse who had them in charge was somewhat doubtful at first as to letting them be seen, but the men themselves had been so insistent on having Ted admitted as soon as he should come that she finally assented, on condition that the interview should be limited to a very few minutes.

"The poor fellows are pretty badly burned," she said. "When the doctors examined them they shook their heads and thought that it was a mere matter of touch and go. Then too, the shock of facing death in that awful way has been very severe. But they're young and

strong, and they've rallied surprisingly. They're out of danger now, but it will be a good while before they'll do any more flying. They've been asking for you all day. That was a wonderful rescue you made, Mr. Scott. The whole hospital has been buzzing with it."

Ted blushed uncomfortably.

"The boys would have done the same for me," he said. "It was all in the day's work."

He tiptoed behind her as she led the way to a little corner of the room in which were the two patients in a space shut off by curtains.

"Not too long now," the nurse warned with a smile, as she drew aside a curtain. "I'm something of a tyrant, you know, and I'll be keeping tabs on you."

"I'll be good," Ted promised.

Two pairs of eyes lighted up as he approached the beds. In those eyes was more than gratitude, something akin to worship. The faces were so covered with wrappings that little but the eyes could be seen.

"Hello, buddies!" Ted greeted them cheerily. "How's tricks?"

"Getting on fine," murmured Jack through his swollen lips. "Thanks to you, old boy, that we're here at all."

"You sure were Johnny on the spot," said Tom. "We owe our lives to you, Ted. And my life's yours, if you ever need it."

"And that goes double," declared Jack.

"I should think you'd be sore at me," jested Ted, "for swinging you at the end of a rope and then ducking you in the water. Playing it rather low down on pals!"

"We forgive you," grinned Jack.

"I'll never forget how I felt when I saw you winging your way up to us," said Tom.

"And even then, I didn't see how you could help us, if you should get near us," put in Jack.

"Didn't myself," admitted Ted. "It came to me on the way up. Lucky I had that rope."

"Lucky you had the brains to use it," corrected Tom. "Gee, Ted, that old headpiece of yours is working all the time!"

"How did the thing happen anyway?" asked Ted.

"Search me," replied Jack. "We were jogging along nice and peaceable, with me at the joystick, when all of a sudden Tom here let out a yip. I looked behind and saw that the back of the plane was in flames. What the dickens started it is more than I can tell. Perhaps, if they yank what is left of the old bus out of the water, they'll be able to find out."

"But that wasn't what interested us just then," put in Tom. "We saw that we couldn't stop it, and we got ready to jump. But just as we were ready to take off, I saw that the fire

had burned holes in Jack's parachute and that it was no good. He saw then that mine was in the same fix. Of course, it would have been suicide to jump."

"I tried then to maneuver the plane down, thinking it might hold together till we struck either land or water," Jack again took up the tale. "But the flames were roaring then, and I'd have been burned up inside. So I set the controls so that it would keep going as long as possible and then we crawled out on the wing. We figured that we'd hold on till the fire reached us and then we'd drop. It would have been a quicker death than burning."

Ted shuddered, as he realized what the poor lads had been through.

"Then we saw you coming," went on Jack, "and Tom here shouted something like 'Glory, hallelujah!' Then he got glum again. Thought that it couldn't do us any good, that death was just kidding us along. I thought so too."

Ted patted his hand gently.

"Well, you're all right now," he said. "Nurse tells me you're doing fine. You'll soon be waggling the old joystick again."

"Hope so," returned Jack. "Makes me sore to be lying here like a baby when there's so much work to do."

"It's funny," remarked Tom reminiscently, "that I should owe my life to a man named

Scott. A man of the same name saved my father's life once. Seems to run in the family."

"It *is* sort of a coincidence," replied Ted with a smile. "Tell me about it."

"It was a long time ago," said Tom. "This old bean of mine is kind of dizzy, and I can't just remember the date. But it was this way. This man named Scott lived——"

Just then the nurse drew aside the curtain and peeped in.

"Time's up," she warned, shaking her finger smilingly.

"Oh, let him stay a little longer," urged Jack.

"I was just telling him something," pleaded Tom.

"It can keep," said the autocrat in the white cap and apron. "You boys be good now and get to sleep."

She was inexorable, and Ted, little dreaming of what that story of Tom's meant to him, bade them farewell, yielded to her gentle tyranny and followed her down the corridor.

As he was going to his quarters, Ted ran across Jefferson Pepp, who seemed to have been lying in wait for him.

"Hello, Jeff," Ted greeted him.

"Evenin', sah, evenin'," replied the old colored man, with much scraping and bowing. "Ah hopes you's well, sah."

"Fine and dandy, thanks," replied Ted cheerily, "and how is Jeff?"

"Tol'able, sah, tol'able, tank you sah," was the reply. "Dat ole misery en mah back ez bodderin' meh sum, but ah's gittin' used ter dat. What ah wanted ter ask yer, sah, wuz wedder yer've heerd anythin' yit about mah ole massa, Majah Claiborne."

Ted shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry, Jeff," he said, "but I haven't. I was up that way this morning."

The old negro's eyes lighted up.

"Up Washin'ton County way?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," replied Ted. "I went to Lamberton and flew above all the country roundabout. But I couldn't see anything of the old plantation. Saw the top of a big house that might have been the Claiborne place but wasn't sure—"

"Wuz dere a cupoler on it?" asked Jeff.

"Yes," replied Ted.

"Den dat muss hev bin de Claiborne place," put in Jeff, "Dere wuzn' any odder dat hed a cupoler near dere."

"It may have been," assented Ted, "But there was no sign of life about it, and the whole plantation was under water."

Tears started in the old fellow's eyes.

"Ah wunner wedder ole massa got away,"

he said mournfully. "'E wuz sech a stubbo'n man, de majah."

"I think more than likely that he did," Ted cheered him up. "Probably some boat came along and took him off. I hope he's all right, not only for his sake and yours but for my own too."

The negro looked at him in some surprise.

"Why, ded yo' know ole Massa Bob?" he asked.

"No, I didn't know him," replied Ted, "but I'm very anxious to know him."

"Doan owe yo' no money nor nuthin'?" asked Jeff doubtfully.

"No, not that," laughed Ted.

"Coz ole massa wuz mahty fo'getful 'bout sum thin's," went on Jeff. "Ah hed ter keep remindin' him all der time 'bout one thin' or anudder. Allers up in der clouds, speshully wen he wuz up dere in de Norf. Dreamin' 'bout de ole plantashun, ah specs. Cudn' seem ter git 'is mind down ter his wuk. He wuzn' cut fur no bizness man nohow, de ole maje wasn'. Lak all der Claibornes," he added with a touch of pride.

"Tell me this, Jeff," asked Ted. "Did you ever hear the major say anything about people named Gale? Or Browning?"

Jeff scratched his head.

"Ah jist cain't 'member," he said after a

pause. "Seems lak ah heerd him wunst say sumthin' bout sum Gales what he sez wuz lak er pack er wolves or sumthin' lak dat. But ah ain' sho' 'bout de name."

There was evidently little help to be gotten from that quarter.

"Listen to me, Jeff," said Ted. "I'm going to look for Major Claiborne everywhere. Soon or late, I may come across him. But if you hear the least thing about his whereabouts, I want you to come and let me know at once. Will you do that?"

"Ah sho will, sah," promised Jeff.

Ted's work for the next few days was exceedingly strenuous. The crest of the river had risen to such a height in the neighborhood of one of the great cities that it seemed the lesser evil to blast away a section of the levees near by and let the flood escape into a large region of the lowlands.

But before the dynamite was used, the people of the imperiled district had to be removed, and every ounce of energy in the Red Cross organization was taxed to the utmost.

Ted was indefatigable. He was here, there and everywhere, and only his youthful vitality and his powerful frame kept him going.

On the third afternoon following his interview with Jeff, he had landed on an isolated

section with bags of provisions for the refugees, pending the coming of boats.

He emptied the bags and then threw them back carelessly in the plane for use on some future occasion. Then he made his takeoff and turned the nose of his plane toward Gordonville.

He was very tired and relaxed into his seat with a sigh of relief. The *Hapworth* was flying along beautifully, the motor was in perfect rhythm. Peace after toil was sweet.

The bags had been thrown in the cockpit by the side of the pilot's seat. The end of one of them got in his way, and he started to kick it aside with his foot.

But he did not kick it.

For the bag was moving!

Moving in a horrid sinuous way as though some long body were stretching itself beneath it!

CHAPTER XXI

The Whir of Rattles

Ted Scott stared at the moving bag as though hypnotized.

A cold sweat broke out all over him. He did not dare to move a muscle.

As though stirred by a gentle breeze or by the breath of a sleeper, the bag continued to undulate, rising and falling. And Ted could trace faintly the outline of something long and rope-like.

Something seemed to have struck a faint note of irritation in that slender shape, for there came to Ted's ears a rustle, a crepitation, something like the rasping of a locust.

But Ted knew it for what it was. The whir of rattles!

He had heard it too often in the last weeks to be mistaken. In the swamps, on the levees, where they had taken refuge, he had seen the ugly heads of the diamond-backed rattlesnakes that had been routed out of their dens by the flood. And he had heard their angry rattling

when disturbed or threatened. That ominous sound, once heard, was never forgotten.

Death was in the plane! The creeping death! And not two feet away from where he sat, as rigid as though carved in stone.

He sensed at once what had happened. The snake had crawled into the plane while Ted was unloading his bags and distributing the provisions among the fugitives.

When Ted had come back he had thrown the empty bags into the plane carelessly, and then gone to examine his motor and propeller.

This had taken him several minutes. In the meantime, the snake, resentful at first at the bags thrown upon it, had finally welcomed the warmth they gave, cuddled up and gone to sleep.

But it was no longer sleeping. It was stirring! At any moment that ugly triangular head might appear from beneath its covering. It would discover the other inmate of the plane. And then——

The slavering fangs! The lightning stroke that meant death! And such a death!

What to do? Ted's tortured mind reviewed the possibilities.

Whatever he did must be done before he made his landing. The jolt of the plane, its jarring as it bumped along the runway would bring the snake into action on the instant. It

was only the dreamy, floating motion of the plane that had kept it quiescent so far.

But what could he do? He might bring up his foot and stamp with all his force on the bag. But the shape was vague, he did not know the position of the head. To strike it anywhere else would only wound and infuriate it. Even if mortally hurt, its fangs would still have time to do their deadly work.

As yet, the snake was oblivious of his presence. It must remain so until the last moment. The least unconsidered movement might be fatal.

But to keep still with every nerve a-quiver was the hardest thing of all. He wanted to shout, to jump, to smash the awful thing that still was moving lazily, as though awakening and yet unwilling to relinquish sleep.

He summoned all his resolution to his aid and sat like a statue. Only his heaving breast betrayed his agitation.

A horrid fascination kept his eyes glued on the bag, and it was only by an effort that he diverted his gaze for brief moments to the guidance of the plane. Instantly however it would come back, as though touched by an electric spring, to that fateful bag.

In one way he had the advantage. He knew that the reptile was there. But the snake did not know that Ted was there. Whatever bene-

fit there was in the element of surprise would be on the side of the human combatant.

One possibility came to Ted's mind. He might bring the *Hapworth* down in the flood, jump out as soon as it struck the water and swim for the shore.

But he knew that this would involve serious damage to his beloved plane and possibly cause its complete destruction. The machine had been his faithful comrade, and he felt toward it as though it were something human. To smash it, to abandon it seemed cowardly. It would make him feel mean and unhappy for the rest of his life.

No, he would not do it. There must be some other way out.

But what way?

His eyes swept frantically over the cockpit, and rested on the hatchet he had used in cutting the rope, after he had brought the rescued aviators to the shallow waters near the shore.

Slowly, so slowly that his hand scarcely seemed to move, it stole toward the weapon. He grasped it with his left hand and cautiously transferred it to the right, leaving the other hand free to guide the plane.

His fingers tightened on the handle. That handle seemed fearfully short. To use the weapon effectively, he would have to bring his hand within striking distance of the deadly

fangs. He would not dare to throw it, for fear of missing his aim.

And now those horrid undulations were becoming more pronounced. The creature was moving. Ted's staring eyes could trace its outlines, and he shuddered as he estimated its length. It must be six feet long at least, a monster of its kind. And the coil seemed to be as thick as his wrist.

With his hatchet upraised, Ted watched for the appearance of the ugly head. There must be no hesitation when that came in sight. He must strike like lightning. If he didn't, the snake would.

The one that got in the first blow would win the fight.

For minutes that seemed hours he watched.

Again there came that whir of rattles. Something was irritating the reptile. The rough bags, perhaps, were rasping against the skin. Or, possibly, it was seeking to creep out and found itself tangled in the folds of its covering.

By this time the plane was hovering above the camp at Gordonville. With his left hand, Ted kept the machine circling about within easy reach of the flying field. For he knew that, if fate went against him and those fangs sank into his flesh, his only hope lay in a swift landing and a hurried trip to the hospital.

Once more the rattles sounded and then subsided. The edge of the bags nearest his feet began to shake. He could see a dreadful triangular lump moving swiftly.

The snake was coming out!

Ted's grip tightened till his fingers seemed to bite into the handle of the hatchet.

Then he saw coming into the sunlight a thin, cruel mouth and a pair of vicious eyes, full of wicked fire.

Those eyes caught sight of Ted. The head upreared like lightning.

Like lightning too was the downward flash of the hatchet!

CHAPTER XXII

Writhing Coils

The hatchet caught the snake just behind the neck and severed its head from its body.

There was a tremendous thrashing of the wicked coils, and blood was spattered all over the plane, Ted himself not escaping the red spray.

The hatchet dropped from Ted's nerveless hand. He was shaking like a leaf. He felt his brain whirling and feared that he would lose consciousness.

By a mighty effort, he took a grip on himself and applied himself to the controls, for the *Hapworth* was in a flurry and seemed to share its master's emotion.

In a few minutes Ted had himself and the plane in hand and was maneuvering for a landing.

He made it and stepped out of the cockpit, to be surrounded by a number of the pilots and mechanics.

"What in thunder was the matter up there?"

asked Bill Twombly. "You were circling about so long that we thought you might be in trouble."

"And we were sure you were when the *Hapworth* began to do an Indian dance," added Roy Benedict.

"Look fellows, he's cut himself," put in Ed Allenby quickly, as he noticed with alarm Ted's blood-bespattered clothing.

"Here's the answer to all your questions," replied Ted, as he reached into the cockpit and drew out the grinning head.

There was an involuntary recoil and exclamations of wonder. Then the airmen crowded around and examined with fascinated disgust the glazed eyes and wicked fangs of Ted's late antagonist.

"Phew, but he's a sockdolager!" exclaimed Bill.

"The granddaddy of them all!" added Roy. "Let's see how big he really was."

They pulled the body of the snake from the fuselage and stretched it on the ground. Even now it was wriggling, and inspired profound repulsion. It was just a couple of inches short of six feet in length, and they counted a dozen rattles.

Then there was a rain of questions and Ted had to recount the details of his awful vigil and the final stroke that brought victory.

"Gee, but that was a tough voyage!" exclaimed Ed.

"Wouldn't go through that for a million dollars," declared Bill.

"A million!" cried Roy. "You're a piker, Bill. I wouldn't have carried that passenger for all the money in the world."

"And I did it for nothing," grinned Ted in reply. "Shows what a big, generous heart I have."

"You were rather sharp with him, though, when it came to collecting the fare," laughed Ed.

"That's a cutting remark," ventured Bill, and Ed made a pass at him.

"I suppose you'll have this head mounted as a souvenir," suggested Roy.

"Not on your life!" denied Ted. "I'll see it often enough in my dreams."

Jefferson Pepp was working on one of the roads of the camp as Ted made his way to headquarters to report.

The old colored man's eyes lighted as they caught sight of Ted.

"Evenin' sah," he said, as he bowed low. "Ah doan s'pose," and there was a touch of wistfulness in his voice, "dat yo' has heerd anythin' 'bout mah ole massa."

"No, Jeff, I'm sorry to say I haven't," returned Ted. "I was just going to ask you the

same question. But while there's life, you know, there's always hope."

"Dat's jest it," returned Jeff mournfully, "S'pose dere ain't no life? Seems lak ah ought fur to heerd somethin' bah dis time, ef massa wuz en de land ob de livin'."

"Don't let that worry you," Ted cheered him. "You may not hear from him for months, but that won't mean anything. Lots of others are in the same fix. He doesn't know where you are, but you're alive just the same. Buck up, Jeff. You'll all be together on the old plantation before long."

He went on, leaving the faithful old servitor considerably encouraged by the brief interview.

"A hurry call has just come in, Ted," stated Colonel Ashdown, after Ted had made his report. "A new break and a big one has occurred in one of the levees about forty miles up the river. There's reported to have been a big loss of life already and worse yet in prospect, unless help can get there at once. It isn't really in my district, but this isn't a time to stand on technicalities. I've been asked for every man that I could spare. Heaven knows I can't spare any, but this seems to be a special emergency. I'll give you the directions and you can start pronto. But this time," he added with a smile—for he had heard from others of

Ted's experience with the rattler—"don't carry any diamondbacks along as passengers."

"I won't," promised Ted with a grin. "I'm no glutton. I know when I've had enough."

They pored over the maps for a few minutes until the young aviator had a clear idea of his destination, and then Ted made a quick trip to the flying field.

It was not without a shudder that he kicked out of the road and into the brush the severed remains of his late gruesome companion. And he saw with pleasure that the *Hapworth* had been thoroughly cleaned during his absence of the blood that had been sprinkled about it. He wanted no reminder of that most dreadful journey of his life.

As he rose into the air, he noted that the sun, which had up to that time been shining brightly, had now withdrawn itself behind banks of ominous looking clouds.

The outlook was bad and was soon justified by the event. Before he had been in the air five minutes, the rain began to fall, at first in scattered drops that rapidly grew in number until at last it was coming down in a torrent.

For the moment this mattered little to him, as, with the windows at the side closed, he was safe and snug in the cockpit. But his face was grave as he noted the addition that the rain was making to the waters of the flood that

needed no swelling. And he knew that it would imperil still further the levees, on which thousands were working so desperately.

"Why couldn't this rain be coming down on the Sahara desert instead of picking on the poor old Mississippi?" he muttered to himself.

And added to the mental discomfort caused by the rain was the fear that fog would soon be coming along to add its dangers to the task he had in hand.

It was an unfamiliar section of the flooded district that he was now approaching, but the colonel's directions had been so explicit that he did not anticipate any difficulty in finding the place where the need was greatest.

The rain still continued with unabated fury, but luckily there was little wind, and he found no trouble in keeping the *Hapworth* on an even keel. And the fog, too, that he dreaded most of all, still held off.

He was speeding along at the rate of a mile a minute, and that gait soon brought him into the area that he was seeking.

And here indeed the devastation exceeded anything that he had yet seen.

He was in a district where but two days ago the ground had still been dry. But to lower the crest of the river it had been thought best that this region, hard as the necessity was, should be used to draw off some of the water

from the main current. In that way the pressure on a great stretch of the levee that was threatening to topple would be relieved and a vastly greater district be saved from overflow. It was a case of choosing the lesser of the two evils.

The inhabitants of the doomed region had been warned of the incoming rush of waters and, as far as possible, helped to leave. It was intended that they should have ample time to secure their safety.

And there would have been sufficient time, if events had moved as intended. A date had been set for blowing up a small section of the levee that would form a crevasse, through which the overflow would rush.

But, through a bit of carelessness on the part of one of the workmen, there had been a premature explosion of the dynamite, and the break had come twenty-four hours sooner than the scheduled date. The hapless people had been caught unawares, and the confusion and loss of life had been frightful.

Where yesterday were smiling farms was now a tossing sea of turbid waters on the current of which floated the bodies of animals and human beings, mingled inextricably with uprooted trees, houses, barns and all the débris of devastated homes.

On the higher spots that had not been

reached by the waters were hordes of refugees, rushing here and there and clamoring for help.

Here was work in plenty, and Ted pitched in with might and main. He was one of many aviators whose planes circled over that heaving waste of waters, but his quickness, his swift judgment and perfect mastery of his plane made him the equal of any two in efficiency.

His radio was kept busy flinging messages into the ether, indicating unerringly the points of greatest need and helping to direct the fleet of launches, skiffs, barges and boats that were engaged in the work of rescue.

Again and again, also, he landed at places where landing was possible, rescuing one here, two there, three at some other place, as many as he could pack into the fuselage of his plane, and conveying them to places of safety.

Night came on, and still Ted worked on with savage energy, guided by the bonfires lighted by the refugees and by the searchlights turned on by the engineers, worked on until he was ready to drop from exhaustion, until his head was whirling and his aching muscles almost refused to obey his will.

Midnight came and found him still spurring himself on to fresh endeavors. And the dawn was breaking when, at last, the message came by radio that all refugees had been located and

that the boats could be depended on to do the rest.

Then only did Ted, his hands shaking so that he could hardly use the controls, turn the nose of his plane toward home.

He had come within perhaps ten miles of Gordonville when, on a small island from which he had rescued people the day before and which he thought deserted, he saw a tree bumping against the shore. And in the branches, lying prone, he descried the figure of a man.

Instantly Ted's eyes sought for a landing. He found one and brought down the plane.

Then he ran swiftly to the tree at the water's edge.

CHAPTER XXIII

A Startling Discovery

Lying between two forks of the floating tree was the body of a man. There was no movement perceptible, and Ted Scott did not know whether the unfortunate was dead, wounded or had fainted with exhaustion.

The current was keeping the tree pressed close to the shore, and Ted climbed into the branches and, by exertions that told on him heavily in his weakened condition, succeeded in dragging the man from his precarious position.

He bore the man some distance from the water and laid him on the turf under a tree.

He tore his shirt open and placed his hand on the man's heart.

To his relief he found that it was beating, though fitfully.

He loosened the man's clothing and chafed his wrists vigorously. At first there was no response, but after a few minutes the man

stirred, sighed and opened his eyes. He tried to speak but Ted stopped him.

"Not now," he said gently. "There'll be plenty of time to talk later on."

He propped his companion with his back against the tree and ran to the plane, from which he returned a moment later with his thermos bottle, that was still half full of hot coffee.

"Drink this," he said, and held the man's head while he drank.

The stimulating drink brought a bit of color to the sufferer's cheeks and he leaned back against the tree with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I have some sandwiches in the plane," said Ted, "if you'd care for them."

"No, thank you," the man replied. "I haven't any appetite. But that coffee certainly touched the spot."

Ted had been covertly studying the stranger. He was a tall, slender man with a refined face and an air of breeding that even his wet and clinging garments could not disguise. He had a moustache and goatee and pleasant blue eyes. His voice was modulated, and was evidently that of a man of education.

"You certainly came along in the very nick of time," remarked the man with a faint smile. "I might have slid off that tree into the water at any minute, and then it would have been all up with me."

"You certainly seem to have had a rough time of it," observed Ted with an answering smile. "How did you come to be in that tree?"

"Not from choice, you may be sure," was the reply. "I was trying to get to a place of safety in a small boat and a log struck it and knocked a hole in it. I swam about in the darkness until I was utterly exhausted, and was just about to sink when this tree came floating by. I caught at the branches and managed to pull myself up into the forks where you found me. I suppose with the exertion and the excitement I must have fainted."

"I felt you over while you were unconscious and found that no bones were broken," replied Ted. "I hope you haven't any internal injuries."

"I guess not," the stranger returned. "I feel right enough inside, except that I'm more tired than I ever have been in my life before."

"What you need is rest," pronounced Ted. "Just as soon as you feel strong enough to walk I'll get you in my plane and we'll be over to the Gordonville hospital in a few minutes."

"It's awfully good of you," returned the man. "You've saved my life, and I shall be eternally grateful. What is your name? I want to know to whom I am so greatly indebted."

"My name is Scott, Ted Scott," was the reply.

The stranger sat upright with a jerk and looked at him open-eyed.

"Not the Ted Scott that flew over the Atlantic?" he exclaimed.

"That's about it," returned Ted with a deprecatory smile. "But come now, let's get to the machine."

"Ted Scott!" repeated the stranger, as though in a daze. "To think that America's idol should be the one to rescue me! That will be something to tell to my grandchildren. And now you're showing as much heroism here as you did then."

"Just doing my share of what ten thousand others are doing," replied Ted. "Are you ready now, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Claiborne," replied the man. "Why—what——"

For Ted had started violently at the mention of the name.

"Major Robert Claiborne of Lamberton?" asked Ted eagerly.

"That's correct," said the stranger. "That is, my plantation is near Lamberton. You seem surprised. May I ask——"

"Surprised indeed," rejoined Ted, "and delighted too. I've been looking for you for weeks."

Major Claiborne looked bewildered.

"I'll tell you all about it," broke in Ted, as he saw that the major was about to speak, "but first, I want to get you into the hands of the doctors. I'll give you my arm, and I guess we can get over to the plane."

"And this is the same plane too that you crossed the Atlantic in?" asked the major, as they reached the spot where the *Hapworth* stood like a bird poised for flight.

"The same," said Ted, as he affectionately patted the machine.

"I declare," observed the major, as Ted helped him into the fuselage, "it's almost worth being half drowned to have this honor."

Ted laughed, started the motor going and leaping into the cockpit made his take-off and started for Gordonville.

He disembarked his passenger at the flying field, and supported him by the arm as they slowly made their way toward the hospital.

He was aching to pour out a flood of questions upon the subject that was so close to his heart, but he refrained until the major should have fully recovered from shock and exhaustion.

Once the major himself broached the question, but Ted put up a deprecating hand.

"Not now, Major," he said. "I'll drop in and see you at the hospital as soon as you have

got back your strength. There'll be plenty of time to talk later on."

To tell the whole truth, Ted himself, now that he had found the man he had been searching for, was almost afraid to put his hopes to the test. Suppose after all, he had been on a wild goose chase and the major knew nothing at all of the Browning-Gale case! That would be a bitter draught to swallow.

They had almost reached the camp when they saw old Jefferson Pepp walking on before them, his head bowed on his breast, his shambling gait indicative of hopelessness.

The major's eyes lighted up as he caught sight of him.

"By all that's wonderful," he exclaimed. "That must be—no—yes, it is old Jeff!"

"No one else," grinned Ted, "and he's been worrying himself to death about you. Oh, Jeff, Jeff!" he shouted.

The old negro turned, and a sudden glory transformed his wrinkled face.

"Marse Bob! Marse Bob!" he cried, running up to them while tears streamed down his cheeks. "You ain't drownded den. De Lohd hez saved yo' fum de watahs! Bress Gawd! Bress Gawd!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Rascality Unmasked

It was an affecting scene and there were tears in the major's eyes as well as in Jeff's.

Ted turned his eyes away until the old negro's emotion had become quieter. Then he smiled at Major Claiborne.

"I guess I'm leaving you in safe hands," he said. "Jeff will take you to the hospital and put you into the doctors' care. A day of rest will work wonders. I've got to go and report now and then snatch a bit of sleep. I'll drop over to see you either tonight or tomorrow morning."

"Fine!" said the major. "I'll be looking for you. And thanks again, a thousand times, for all you have done for me."

Ted turned in his report and then got into, or rather fell into, his bunk, where slumber instantly claimed him.

But, tired as he was, he left word that he should be called at noon. And all that after-

noon he was scouting aloft in his plane, alert and resourceful as ever.

He thanked his stars for the singular chance by which he had rescued Major Claiborne. He knew that Charity however would not call it chance. To her it would have been a direct interposition of Providence.

Dear old Charity! And Eben! That faithful, devoted pair to whom he owed so much. Was it possible that he was on the verge of a discovery that would bring peace and sunlight into their sorely tried lives?

But he did not want to build castles in the air, lest they should tumble about his ears, and he steeled himself for the possible—and, as he was forced to admit to himself, the probable—disappointment in store for him.

He was rejoiced to find when he went over to the camp that night that the major had so quickly and fully regained his strength that the doctors had permitted him to leave the ward and take up his quarters in a tent that Jeff had secured for him.

The major was ensconced in a rocking chair, enjoying a pipe, while Jeff hovered about with all the anxiety of a hen over its one chick. The old colored man was in the seventh heaven of delight, and his face was beaming as he ushered Ted into his master's presence.

The greeting of the major was fervent, and

he wrung Ted's hand as Jeff brought the visitor a seat.

"I've been longing all day to see you again," he said, "especially as, from what you said this morning and Jeff has been trying to tell me since, I gather that I may be able possibly to be of some service to you. Of course, Jeff isn't at all clear about it, but I imagine it has something to do with my brief stay up North."

"That's it exactly, Major," replied Ted. "It concerns something that happened while you were at Caxton. You were engaged then, I believe, in some work at the county clerk's office in that town."

"The recorder's," corrected Major Claiborne. "Yes, I was there for a couple of years. I've wondered sometimes," he added whimsically, "whether I really earned my salary. I never fooled myself into believing that I was a good business man."

"Jest hear 'im!" muttered Jeff indignantly. "Dey ain't a bettah breedah ob race hosses en de State of Arkansas."

Both his hearers laughed.

"By the way," asked Ted, "did you get your horses off safely, Major."

His host's face lighted up.

"I did, thank goodness!" he said. "Sent them off on a barge, with a couple of men to guard them, to New Orleans. That's one thing

the flood hasn't taken away from me."

"Good!" rejoined Ted heartily. "And now about Caxton. Do you remember anything about a transfer of real estate from Eben Browning to Brewster Gale?"

The major cogitated.

"Browning! Gale!" he murmured to himself. Then memory came to him.

"Oh, yes, I do remember," he said. "There was a good deal of skullduggery in that case. That Gale was a rascal, a mean, ornery rascal. I remember that I found out some crookedness in the transfer and looked the matter up. Got far enough, I know, to make a couple of affidavits that I figured would put a spoke in his wheel."

"What did you do with those affidavits?" asked Ted eagerly.

"Why, I suppose I put them in the records of the office," replied the major placidly. "That would have been the usual course. I remember now that the very day I made them out I got a wire from the plantation telling me that my uncle was dead and that I was the heir to the property. Of course I was mighty flustered and got away as soon as I had packed up."

"Dat sho' wuz one mahty excitin' day," murmured Jeff reminiscently.

"So if you'll look up those affidavits." went

on the major, "you'll find the papers, and I hope they'll be of service to you."

"But that's just our trouble," replied Ted. "We have looked them up, and they're not there."

"Not there?" repeated the major straightening up in the chair. "But they must be there. Where else?"

"I don't know," was the reply. "But we've searched high and low for them and can't find a trace of them."

Chagrin came into the major's face.

"Is—it—possible?" he muttered, half to himself. "Is it possible that I could have omitted to file them?"

"Yo sho wuz mahty flustered dat day, majah," put in Jeff. "Ah mind dat you was runnin' round lak a chicken wiv 'er haid cut orf. Yer wuz frowin' papahs ter me an' tellin' me ter put dem en der trunk, en lukkin' et yer watch ter see if we hed time ter ketch de train. Yassah, yo' sho' wuz het up consid'abul."

"I know I was wrought up a great deal," observed the major, "but I didn't think I could do such a fool thing as to leave those papers unfiled. Yet if they are not there, it looks as thought I might have done it. But it was unpardonable."

"Not at all," put in Ted. "We all forget

to do things at times. But suppose for a moment that you did put them in the trunk. Where is the trunk? Might they not be there yet?"

"Jeff," said the major, "what became of that old trunk? Hasn't been broken up or thrown away, has it?"

"Nussah," replied Jeff. "Et's in de house all right, down on de plantashun."

Ted grasped at this as at a straw.

"Good!" he cried. "We may get the papers yet. That is, if they were really thrown in there."

But Major Claiborne's face had clouded.

"Even if we got them, I fear they would be ruined by this time," he said. "The house has been under water, that is, the greater part of it has, and any papers must be just a mass of sodden pulp. The ink in all likelihood has been so far washed off as to be illegible. What room was that trunk in, Jeff?"

The old negro scratched his grizzled head.

" 'Pears lak de last time ah seed et et wuz up in de cupoler," he vouchsafed. "Dat little sto'room lak, jes' orf de attic."

"The cupola!" cried Ted, springing to his feet. "But that wasn't under water. Don't you remember, Jeff, I told you that that hadn't been reached by the flood?"

"Yo sho ded, Marse Ted," replied Jeff.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the major. "Then there is still a chance. I don't suppose the contents of the trunk have been touched after Jeff took my clothes out of it."

"I'll go the first thing tomorrow," cried Ted, in great excitement. "That is, Major, if you'll give me permission to enter the house."

"Permission?" repeated the major. "I'll do more than that. I'll go with you, and we'll hunt for the papers together."

"Bully!" exclaimed Ted. "I can't use the *Hapworth* this time, but I'll get a seaplane. And there'll be room for Jeff to come along too."

The plan was agreed to at once.

There was some more conversation, during which Ted acquainted the major fully with all the details of the Browning-Gale case. And as he talked the major's memory became clearer on some of the details.

Not clear enough, though, Ted feared, to make his testimony conclusive. A shrewd lawyer on the other side could easily nullify its value by dwelling on vagueness and omissions. It became more and more evident to Ted that the documents alone could make his case ironclad.

It was with high hopes and yet with considerable trepidation that Ted, Major Claiborne and Jeff started out the next morning in the

seaplane that Ted had borrowed for the occasion.

In less than an hour they had reached the plantation, the sight of which, covered with water, brought a melancholy shadow on the faces of the major and his faithful servant.

But the house was standing, and the cupola was still above the surface of the waters.

Ted brought the seaplane down close by and maneuvered it until he got it alongside one of the cupola's windows. They forced the window and crept in.

Ted's heart was beating like a triphammer. What would he find?

CHAPTER XXV

The Sweets of Victory

One after the other, following Ted's successful effort in bringing the seaplane beside the window and mooring it securely, they crept into the room surmounted by the cupola.

"Dar et is!" exclaimed Jeff excitedly, as his eyes fell on an old trunk in the corner. "Didn' ah tell you at et wuz up heah? Kain't fool ole Jeff!"

In a moment they had drawn it to the window, where the light fell upon it. There was no key, but they forced one of the rusted hasps and, groaningly, the cover lifted.

There was a miscellaneous collection of objects, thrown there helter-skelter. No excess of tidiness could be charged against Jeff's packing.

They threw everything out on the floor in eager haste, and Ted's heart sank as the trunk was hastily emptied without revealing at first what he sought.

It was only at the very bottom that they came

across a sheaf of documents, tied together with a string.

The major seized the package, broke the string with a snap and looked the documents over rapidly.

"By Jove, I believe I have them!" he exclaimed, as he unfolded two legal looking papers and held them up to the light.

Then he clapped Ted on the shoulder.

"Got them, my boy!" he cried exultingly. "The very things! Here, look them over."

With fingers that trembled, Ted snatched the papers and ran over their contents.

And as he read his heart thrilled with jubilation. Here was the proof, clear, positive and convincing of the duplicity of Brewster Gale.

Ted was no lawyer, but he did not have to be to estimate the value of this treasure trove. He knew that, put before any man of commonsense, the documents would carry conviction. And he hugged himself as he thought of the way that Mr. Barstow would chuckle when he added these to his bundle of proofs.

There would be no hesitation now in going into court. The case was ironclad. In fact Ted doubted whether the case would ever be allowed to go to court. Gale's lawyers, if apprised of the contents of these affidavits, would know that their client was beaten, and would probably advise him to seek a compromise, or,

if that were not possible, yield to the inevitable and surrender the property that he had gained by fraud, thus avoiding the cost of a trial.

"And to think that you might have had these long ago, if it had not been for my carelessness!" mourned the major in self-reproach. "I ought to be shot. Now you'll agree with me that I'm no business man."

"Mahty fine breedah ob race hosses, jess de same," put in loyal old Jeff in his master's vindication.

"Don't say a word," replied Ted to the major's apologetic words. "It's I who owe you a thousand thanks for putting them into my hands. Those papers are worth a fortune. I'm going to send them up North at once. This is sure my lucky day!"

"Well, if anyone deserves luck more than Ted Scott, I don't know him," declared the major heartily.

They made quick time in getting back to Gordonville. Once there, Ted carefully wrapped the precious documents, after having made an attested copy of them, and forwarded them to Mr. Barstow at his Chicago office by registered mail.

Then he telegraphed, with reckless disregard of cost, long messages to Mr. Hapworth and to Eben, giving them the main facts and telling them that letters would follow later.

And now, with a heart lighter than it had been for many weeks, he plunged again into the work of rescue. Day after day he labored, spending himself without stint, until at last the crest of the flood had passed and the waters began to recede.

Then came a day when he felt that his work there was done. He had fought a good fight. He had kept the faith.

Despite the care that he took to keep himself in the background as much as possible, what he had done had been noised abroad. The episode of the heroic rescue from the burning plane, especially, had been blazoned all over the country and even abroad. And to these had been added other instances of rare devotion that enshrined him more fully in American hearts than ever before.

At Gordonville itself he had made many warm and enduring friendships, not only with the many refugees to whom he had seemed a messenger from heaven but also with the army officers and his fellow aviators.

Jack Emmet and Tom Ralston had completely recovered from the burns they had received in the blazing plane. Their devotion to Ted was beyond words. Major Claiborne was bound to him by hooks of steel. And as for Jeff, whatever time he could spare from his beloved "massa" was spent in following Ted around,

in the hope of being of some service to him.

"Ain't nebber hed much use fur Norfeners," Jeff declared to his cronies with a shake of his woolly head, "but dat Marse Ted Scott ez sho' one ob de chosen ob de Lohd."

Ted had a great send-off when, on the day of his departure, he stepped into the cockpit of the *Hapworth*. It seemed as though the whole population had turned out to do him honor.

Colonel Ashdown wrung his hand fervently.

"You've been a host in yourself," he said. "and the service you have given cannot be measured in words. Our association will always be one of the cherished memories of my life."

"I feel the same way about you," responded Ted earnestly.

The motor roared, the blocks were knocked away, and the *Hapworth* whizzed down the runway and soared into the skies, while the crowd shouted acclamations.

The journey was favored by fair weather that reflected Ted's inward mood. He was filled with content and happiness. He had done what he started out to do. And the thought of the help he had been to those poor, stricken people gave him more real satisfaction than had his great trip over the Atlantic.

He made a roundabout trip, going first to Washington, where he reported to the Chief of

the Red Cross and had another fruitful visit with the head of the aviation service. News of his coming had preceded him, and an immense throng greeted him at Bolling Field and dogged his steps wherever he went in the national capital.

His next stop was at Chicago, where he was hilariously welcomed by Mr. Barstow, whose delight at having received the documents Ted had sent him knew no bounds.

"A clear open and shut case now," he declared. "They haven't a leg to stand on. They'll be running for cover like so many rabbits."

"That will be a pleasant sight," grinned Ted, "and it can't happen too soon to suit me."

The welcome that Ted received on his arrival at Bromville will long be memorable in the annals of the town. Business was practically suspended on his arrival. Flags and bunting and bands hailed the young aviator, who, by his work during the flood, had added to the lustre of his first exploit.

Ted's heart swelled at this warm demonstration of the home folks' approval, but after all nothing equaled the delight he felt when Eben wrung his hand and dear old Charity folded him in her embrace.

The three sat up late that night for there were numberless questions to be asked and an-

swered. Gone now was the frown of care from Eben's brow! Gone the look of heartache from Charity's eyes!

The old couple fairly quivered with excitement as Ted told them of his rescue of Jack Emmet and Tom Ralston from the burning plane.

"Ralston!" murmured Eben. "I've heerd that name before. Ralston! Ralston! Seems like it had somethin' to do with you, Ted, too. Now, let me see——"

But though he cudgeled his memory, it played him traitor and the subject was dismissed. They were too happy in the state of their altered fortunes to think of much else.

The wheel of fortune had turned, and the old couple no longer had to fear poverty in their declining years. Justice, long delayed, was to be done them. There was every prospect that they would soon have, not only a competence, but a snug little fortune.

And that prospect was soon justified by the event. For Mr. Barstow's prophecy proved to be correct. Faced by irrefutable proofs and with the shadow of jail upon him, Brewster Gale, on his lawyers' advice, made unconditional surrender.

The Hotel Excelsior, the building itself, was of course Gale's. But he had to yield the ground on which it was built and the golf links

adjoining. The Brownings of course could have ruined him by demanding the removal of the building from their land.

But they were generous to the cowed and discomfited scoundrel who had so bitterly wronged them. They forebore either to ruin him or send him to jail. A company was formed, with Mr. Hapworth at its head, that bought from Eben the golf links and the ground on which the hotel stood. The latter they leased to Gale at a figure that made the miser wince. Shorn of a large part of his fortune, despised and discredited among his fellow citizens, he cut a pitiful figure in the community in which he had been wont to swagger. And his dissipated sons, Greg and Duck shared in his eclipse.

Eben received for his property a very handsome sum, which covered not only its original value, but the increase due to the growth of the town, with interest in full from the date of the first sale. Justice had been long in coming, but it came at last.

"Well, Ted," remarked Mr. Hapworth, in one of their conferences, "what next? Or have you exhausted all the thrills that happen to be on tap?"

"It does almost look that way, doesn't it?" laughed Ted.

But that there were thrills in plenty yet in store for the daring young aviator will be

shown by the next book of this series, entitled: "Over the Rockies With the Air Mail; Or, Ted Scott Lost in the Wilderness."

The clamors of his townsmen for another exhibition of his wonderful flying were only stilled when Ted consented.

His mastery of his plane had been measurably increased by his experiences during the flood, and the stunts he showed the breathless multitude made them gasp. It capped the climax of anything they had ever seen, and he had them on tiptoe with excitement.

"Did you ever see the like?" exclaimed Mark Lawson.

"He's got them all beat," affirmed Jack Forrest.

"By a mile," declared Breck Lewis.

"There's plenty of aviators," said Big Bill Ellison, "but there's only one Ted Scott!"

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